

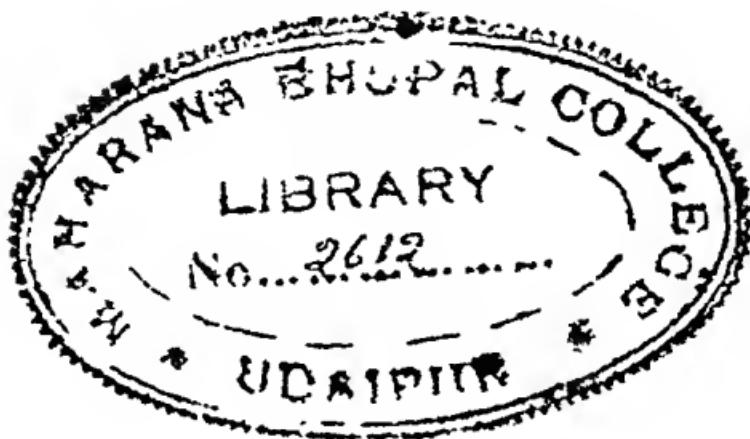
POST-MORTEM

POST-MORTEM

A Play in Eight Scenes

by

NOEL COWARD



London

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD

First published 1931

Printed in Great Britain at the Windmill Press
Kingwood Surrey

TO WILLIAM BOLITHO

Dear William,—

This play was meant for you anyhow, and now that you are so suddenly dead, I dedicate it to your memory, because of all people you penetrated the most swiftly through the trappings and affectations of immediate success, and by your gentleness and strength and uncompromising integrity, made so much clear for me that might have remained blurred and confused for ever if I had not been lucky enough to know you. The loss of you as a friend is a personal grief which Time will inevitably diminish until it is only a little sadness, but the loss of you as an artist cannot be measured, and if the world doesn't seek you out, and find you out, so much the worse for the world. It can't matter to you.

Noël.

1930.

CHARACTERS

JOHN CAVAN

LADY CAVAN

SIR JAMES CAVAN

TILLEY

SHAW

BABE ROBINS

PERRY LOMAS

JENNER, a batman

CORPORAL MACEY

MONICA CHELLERTON

BERTIE CHELLERTON

KITTY HARRIS

EGGIE BRACE

DRAKE, a butler

ALFRED BORROW

MISS BEAVER

LADY STAGG-MORTIMER

THE BISHOP OF KETCHWORTH

SIR HENRY MERSTHAM

A BUTLER

SHAW (aged 39) TILLEY (aged 43)

BABE ROBINS (aged 32)

The action of this play should be continuous
and the changes of scene managed as quickly as
possible, during which the Auditorium should
remain in darkness

SCENE I

The scene is a company headquarters in a quiet section of the Front Line in the Spring of 1917. It is a roughly built shelter with a sloping corrugated tin roof. There is an entrance up Right centre which leads round into the front trench and a doorway left. At the back there is a sandbag wall reaching to within a few feet of the roof, through this opening can be seen the higher wall of the back trench topped with mud and grass and a few old tins, beyond this can be seen occasionally the flashes of guns far back. Every few moments during the whole scene there is the flare of a Verey light.

It is about 8.30 in the evening.

(TILLEY, SHAW, BABE ROBINS and JOHN CAVAN have just finished dinner and as the Curtain rises JENNER, the batman, is serving them with mugs of coffee. ROBERT TILLEY is a man of about thirty, pleasant looking, with certain authority as befits a Company Commander. SHAW is younger, about twenty-six, fatish and good-humoured, and inclined to be rascous in jollity. BABE ROBINS is nineteen, nice and clean looking, his face which is ordinarily cheerful, is now set and strained. JOHN CAVAN is about twenty-seven or twenty-eight. He is tall, not remarkable looking in any way, his face is rather pale and his eyes look tired. He has had command of the Company for several months until a few weeks back, when TILLEY returned from

leave after being bounded and took over from him.
 SHAW is seated on a bunk, left, with his legs stuck out
 in front of him, chuckling over a copy of the "Daily
Mercury" TILLEY is sitting at the back of the table
 smoking JOHN is sprawled on the bunk, right, and
 BABE ROBINS is at the end of the table, leaning against
 a post which supports the roof, and staring into space
 JENNER, bearing green coffee to TILLEY and JOHN, offers
 some to BABE.)

JENNER Coffee, sir?

BABE (focussing his attention). Er--er--no thanks

JENNER (persuasively). Nice and 'ot to-night, sir

BABE No thanks, Jenner I don't want any.

JENNER goes across to SHAW.

JENNER Coffee, sir?

SHAW (taking a mug) Thanks Put in a couple of
 spoonfuls for me

JENNER (doing so) Yes, sir

JENNER goes off left

SHAW (laughing) God! This paper's rich, so full
 of plums it's downright indigestible.

TILLEY What is it? The *Mercury*?

SHAW Of course I wouldn't read anything else,
 not while I'm out here anyhow A little honest English
 fun goes a long way out here Have you read Lady
 Stagg-Mortimer's open letter to England? It's called
 "I gave my son."

TILLEY And did she?

JOHN Oh yes I was in the O.T.C. with him for
 three months Whenever she came to visit the camp
 he used to lock himself in the latrine. They hated one
 another

TILLEY (*to ROBINS*): Want some port?

BABE: No thanks, Tilley.

SHAW (*reading delightedly*): "Every woman of England should be proud and glad to give and give and give, even the flesh of her flesh and the blood of her blood—"

TILLEY: And the tripe of her tripe. Sorry, John, I'd forgotten your father owns the bloody paper.

JOHN: Don't rub it in.

SHAW: One thing I will say about the *Mercury*, it's moral tone is sound and high, and it's very right-minded about the war. It thinks war is evil all right, but necessary. And it's absolutely beastly about the Germans. It criticises them most severely. Who is the *Mercury's* War Correspondent, Cavan?

JOHN: Damned if I know.

SHAW: He seems to be a fine upstanding lad and observant. He's actually noticed the way we all go over the top cheering and shouting "For God and Country."

JOHN: Oh, dry up! (*He laughs, and getting up, helps himself to port.*)

SHAW: You must have a nice talk to your father when you go home on leave. Tell him how we all kneel down and pray before an attack, you might take him a snapshot of it.

TILLEY: The light's not good enough.

SHAW: He could use a time exposure, surely you'd be willing to wait a few minutes for God and the *Mercury*!

BABE (*suddenly*): Has any word come from battalion headquarters, Tilley?

TILLEY: No.

BABE : They'd let us know at once, wouldn't they,
if—

TILLEY : Perry will be back soon, he went to the
M.O. to have his hand seen to. He'll know how
Armitage is.

BABE : Perhaps they've taken him down!

TILLEY . Perhaps. Don't worry

BABE (*rising*) . I think I'll go and write a letter to
his people, just to warn them. I don't go on duty till
nine.

TILLEY : Right. Cheer up!

BABE : Thanks, Tilley

BABE goes out miserably

JOHN : Do you think they've taken him down?

TILLEY (*shaking his head*) . No, he couldn't be moved.
I doubt if he'll last more than a few hours

SHAW . Bloody awful luck!

CORPORAL MACEY enters and salutes

TILLEY . Yes, Corporal Macey?

CORPORAL . Mr Shaw, sir, please.

SHAW (*looking up*) . Yes?

CORPORAL : Carrying party just coming up with the
R.E. material, sir.

SHAW (*rising and putting belt on*) . All right. Fall in
the working party. I'll come straight up.

CORPORAL . Yes, sir

He salutes and exits

TILLEY . Get things going as soon as you can, Shaw.
I'll be round presently

SHAW : Right

*He picks up his electric torch from the bunk, puts on
his gas mask and tin hat and goes towards the doorway*

PERRY LOMAS enters. He is thin and looks nervous

His hand is bandaged.

SHAW: Hallo! How's the hand?

PERRY: Nothing much, thanks.

SHAW: Cheero!

SHAW goes out.

PERRY takes off his helmet and mask and belt.

TILLEY: Well, what did he say?

PERRY: It'll be all right in a day or so. He told me to rest it as much as possible, and gave me an anti-tetanus injection.

TILLEY: Good! You're on the new machine gun emplacement, aren't you?

PERRY: Yes. I'm going up at nine.

TILLEY: On your way you might take a look and see how number 8 platoon's getting on with their bit of parapet.

PERRY: All right. (*Calling*) Jenner—dinner please!

JENNER (*off*): Coming, sir.

PERRY sits down at the table. TILLEY continues to write in his note-book. JENNER brings in a plate of soup, puts it down in front of PERRY and exits.

PERRY (*starting his soup*): Armitage is dead.

TILLEY (*looking up*): When?

PERRY: Just before I left the Aid Post.

TILLEY: I thought as much. It looked pretty hopeless.

JOHN: Poor kid!

PERRY: He's well out of it.

TILLEY (*quietly*): Shut up, Perry.

JOHN: Somebody's got to tell him.

TILLEY: Tell who—Robins?

PERRY: I think he knows.

JOHN: No. He's waiting for news, he's in his

dug-out, I'll tell him presently

There is a pause

TILLEY (rising) Well, if the Adjutant calls up, give me a shout I've got to go through these bloody returns with the Company Sergeant Major.

JOHN All right, Bob

Tilley goes out

JENNER re-enters with a plate of meat and potatoes and exits with the empty soup plate. JOHN goes on reading his magazine. PERRY rises, takes SHAW's "Mercury" from his bunk and props it up in front of him on the table. There is silence. PERRY reads a little and then throws the paper on the floor.

PERRY (angrily) Oh, Christ!

JOHN. What's up?

PERRY That muck makes me sick!

JOHN (nearly) What does it matter?

PERRY (bitterly) "I gave my son." "Women of England!" "God and Country" Your father owns the blasted rag. Why don't you do something about it?

JOHN (smiling) What could I do?

PERRY Tell him the truth for a change!

JOHN He knows—he's not a fool!

PERRY You mean he's an ambitious hypocrite?

JOHN Of course

PERRY Do you like him at all?

JOHN No I admire him rather

PERRY What for?

JOHN For getting what he wants He's a good climber

PERRY What does your mother think about him?

JOHN I do wish you'd shut up, Perry There's no sense in working yourself up into rages.

PERRY: I'm sorry. It gets in my mind and I can't get it out—all that mealy mouthed cant being shoved down the people's throats!

JOHN: The demand creates the supply, I think. The civilian public must enjoy its war; and it also has to reconcile it with a strong sense of patriotism and a nice Christian God. It couldn't do that if it had the remotest suspicion of what really happens.

PERRY: Do you think it will ever know?

JOHN: I hope so, later on, much later, when it's all over.

PERRY (*violently*): Never, never, never! They'll never know whichever way it goes, victory or defeat. They'll smarm it all over with memorials and Rolls of Honour and Angels of Mons and it'll look so noble and glorious in retrospect that they'll all start itching for another war, egged on by dear old gentlemen in clubs who wish they were twenty years younger, and newspaper owners and oily financiers, and the splendid women of England happy and proud to give their sons and husbands and lovers, and even their photographs. You see, there'll be an outbreak of war literature in so many years, everyone will write war books and war plays and everyone will read them and see them and be vicariously thrilled by them, until one day someone will go too far and say something that's really true and be flung into prison for blasphemy, immorality, lese majesty, unnatural vice, contempt of court, and atheism, then there'll be a glorious religious revival and we'll all be rushed across the Atlantic to conquer America, comfortably upheld by Jesus and the Right!

JOHN (*laughing*): Wonderful, Perry—simply wonderful!

PERRY Don't laugh, I mean it. Stop laughing!

JOHN (*continuing*) I can't help it

PERRY You're not really laughing anyhow—you're as sick as I am inside.

JOHN Not quite I don't think poor old England is as bad as all that

PERRY It isn't poor old England particularly, it's poor old Human Nature There isn't a hope for it anywhere, all this proves it

JOHN You're wrong There are a few moments among these war years of higher value than any others, just a few every now and then

PERRY (*sarcastically*) Christian value, I suppose you mean? Christian forbearance, nobility of spirit, Lady Stagg-Mortimer

JOHN You know I don't mean that!

PERRY What do you mean then?

JOHN You should see it quicker than I. You're a poet, aren't you?

PERRY I was

JOHN Cheer up, Perry!

PERRY I envy you, anyway You've got a damned philosophic outlook, that's what you've got

JOHN Somebody must be learning something from all this

PERRY Nobody's learning anything It's too big, too utterly futile

JOHN You can't be sure Years and years and years ahead we may know

PERRY We may know

JOHN I didn't mean "we" personally I'm taking a God's-eye view

PERRY Are you happy on your cloud, watching kids

like Armitage torn to pieces, screaming in bloody pain—will it gratify your omnipotence as God to see his mother's face when she opens the telegram. He's an only son, I believe. He had his twenty-first birthday last week when we were out of the line—we had a grand evening—you remember, you were there—

JOHN : Yes, I was there.

PERRY : He wasn't even killed in an attack or a raid, no glory, just stupid chance.

JOHN (*quietly*) : Look here, Perry, I've been here longer than you and I'm going to give you some advice whether you like it or not. You're heading for a smash. Perhaps because you've got more temperament than I, or more imagination, or less control, but whatever it is, shut it off, keep it down, crush it! We can none of us afford a personal view out here, we're not strong enough—no one is strong enough. There's just a limited number of things we can bear to think about, sleep, warmth, food, drink, self preservation, no more—no more than that.

PERRY : Voluntary reversion to animalism.

JOHN : Not voluntary, compulsory.

PERRY : Aren't you touched by it any more? Not now, I don't mean now when everything's comparatively quiet, but when we're in the thick of it, floundering through mud in an attack, treading on men's faces, some of them not dead, with the bloody din of the barrage in our ears, and thin human screams cutting through it—quite clearly like penny whistles in a thunderstorm—

JOHN : I'm all right then—too much to do, no time.

PERRY : What about when it's over and we fall back sometimes, hack over that idiotic ground, having to go

quickly, not hearing people groaning or crying for water—when we flop down in a dug-out, safe, for the moment, time to think then, isn't there—can you help thinking then?

He rises during this and stands over JOHN's bunk.

JOHN. I believe something will come out of it—something must, when those who do get through go back home, they'll be strong enough to count somehow

PERRY Not they They'll slip back into their smug illusions, England will make it hot for them if they don't Remember we're a Christian country.

JOHN I'm waiting, treading water, waiting to see

PERRY You'll probably be blown to pieces if you wait long enough Then you'll never see

JOHN I'm not so sure. I have a feeling that one might see the whole business just for a second before one dies Like going under an anesthetic, everything becomes blurred and enormous and then suddenly clears, just for the fraction of a fraction of a moment Perhaps that infinitesimal moment is what we're all waiting for really

PERRY (*irritably*) Well, in that case the war is highly to be commended, it's providing thousands of your infinitesimal moments per day per person. Very comforting!

JOHN Just as comforting as anything else. Time is very interesting Nobody has found out much about it, perhaps there isn't any, perhaps it's just a circle and Past and Future are the same. Funny if the current got switched and we all started remembering twenty years hence and looking forward to last Tuesday

PERRY God forbid that I should ever look forward to any of the last Tuesdays I've lived through

JOHN : What's your particular Devil ?

PERRY : God, I think.

BABE ROBINS comes in. He looks at PERRY anxiously.

BABE : Perry !

PERRY : Yes ?

BABE : What's happened about Armitage ? Have they taken him down yet ?

PERRY (after a slight pause) : No, Babe—it wouldn't be any use—he's dead.

BABE : Oh, I see.

There is a silence. BABE stands quite still.

PERRY (awkwardly) : Don't worry about him, kid, he didn't have much pain, he was unconscious. (He shoots a bitter look at JOHN and says more loudly) Unconscious !

PERRY goes out abruptly.

BABE sits down by the table.

BABE (breaking the silence, dully) : I'd just written to his mother saying he'd been pretty badly hit. She's—she's awfully nice, they live in Somerset.

JOHN (rising) : If I were you I'd have a spot of whisky. (He goes to the table and pours some whisky into a mug and gives it to him.)

BABE (taking it) : Thanks awfully. (He gulps it down.)

JENNER comes in and piles all the dinner things on to a tray)

JENNER (to BABE) : Shall I have a cup of tea ready for you, sir, when you come off duty ?

BABE doesn't answer. JOHN speaks quickly.

JOHN : Very good idea ! I'd like a cup now, can you hurry it along, Jenner ?

JENNER: Yes, sir

He goes off with the tray

JOHN instinctively puts his arms round BABE's shoulders. BABE sits still for a moment, then gently disengages himself and walks over to the bunk, left.

BABE (*wistfully*) Don't say anything to me, will you? I don't want to blub and make a fool of myself. You see we were at Sandhurst together and school, we've been together all along, for years really. I shall miss him—very much—(*His voice breaks so he stops talking*)

JOHN (*practically*) Look here, old chap, you'd better stay here quietly for a little. I don't go on until midnight, we'll just swap duties. I'll take over your covering party now, and you can do my tour for me at twelve. That'll give you time to steady yourself a bit.

BABE Thanks ever so much, it's awfully decent of you.

He fumbles in his pocket for a cigarette. JOHN hastily bands him a tin from the table. BABE lights one and puffs at it. JOHN puts on his belt and gas mask and hat.

JOHN Lend me your torch, will you? I think Shaw's pinched mine.

BABE (*giving it to him with a slight smile*) Here.

JOHN Thanks. Cheers.

As he is about to go out he meets TILLEY coming in. He speaks quietly.

Look here, Bob—(*he points to BABE*)—he's a bit knocked out over Armitage, if you've no objection I'll do his covering party. He'll go on for me later.

TILLEY That's all right.

JOHN Thanks.

TILLEY sits at the table, and bringing a pile of loose papers out of his pocket, proceeds to check them through with a pencil. He glances over at BABE once or twice.

TILLEY: There's some port left in the bottle, Babe, d'you want a drop?

BABE: No thanks, Tilley.

PERRY re-enters and begins to put on his belt, gas mask, etc. He looks at his watch.

PERRY: I make it five to nine—is that right?

TILLEY (looking at him): Yes. Try and get that emplacement done to-night. I want to avoid any work on it in the daylight.

PERRY: If it only stays quiet the way it has the last three nights, and that machine-gun from the sunken road doesn't start pooping at us—we'll get through it in a few hours.

TILLEY: Right. I'll be along later.

There is a sudden outbreak of machine-gun fire, several bullets whistle over the top of the shelter.

(Jumping to his feet) Blast! They've spotted the wiring party.

There is another burst of fire—TILLEY and PERRY stand listening.

PERRY: They must have got them in that flare.

TILLEY: I'll go and have a look.

They both move towards the entrance. CORPORAL MACEY dashes in.

CORPORAL: Mr. Cavan been 'it, sir, got him just as 'e was getting out of the trench.

TILLEY: Anyone else hit?

CORPORAL: No, sir.

TILLEY: Bring Mr. Cavan in here, quick!

CORPORAL: Yes, sir.

He goes off

JENNER enters with a cup of tea

TILLEY · Jenner!

JENNER Yes, sir?

TILLEY Get the stretcher-bearers!

JENNER Yes, sir.

He puts the cup of tea on the table and rushes off.

PERRY flings several papers and magazines off the bunk downstage and makes a pillow from a pack that is lying nearby Two Men carry in JOHN and lay him on the bunk BABE jumps to his feet

BABE (*shrilly*) What's happened? What's happened?

TILLEY · Quiet—get some water—quickly!

He stands looking at JOHN carefully BABE hurries over with a mug of water TILLEY takes it from him, and kneeling down, hoists JOHN's head up a little and forces some water between his lips PERRY stands a little way off watching, his hands are twitching nervously

BABE (*bursting into sobs*) It's my fault! It's my fault! He was doing my duty for me, it ought to have been me Oh Christ! It ought to have been me! (He crumples up against the table)

TILLEY · Shut up—for God's sake be quiet!

JOHN (*opens his eyes and smiles, speaking painfully*): I'll know now, Perry—I'm right, I bet you I'm right—I'll know—I'll know—

Two STRETCHER-BEARERS come in as the LIGHT fades out and there is complete darkness and silence except for the distant rumbling of guns

END OF SCENE I

SCENE II

SIR JAMES CAVAN's house in Kent. It is a spring evening, about nine o'clock in the year 1930. The scene is LADY CAVAN's bedroom. It is a comfortable and charmingly furnished room, and the view from the window is magnificent. First, low wooded hills, then the Romney Marshes, and beyond them, the sea.

LADY CAVAN is seated by the window at a bridge-table playing Canfield Patience. She is a graceful-looking old lady. The twilight is fading rapidly, and every now and then she pauses in her game to look out at the distant lights coming to life along the coast. When the curtain has been up for a few moments JOHN walks quietly into the room. He is in uniform and looks exactly as he did in the preceding scene. As he comes in, there seems to be a distant rumble of guns a long way off, and the suggestion of a Verey flare shining briefly and dying away. He stands by the table opposite to LADY CAVAN. She sees him and puts down the pack of cards slowly.

LADY C. (in a whisper) : Johnnie !

JOHN : Hullo, mother !

LADY C. : I daren't speak loudly or move, you might disappear.

JOHN : I won't disappear. I've only just come.

LADY CAVAN holds out her arms. JOHN comes round the table and kneels on the floor by her chair. She holds him tightly and very still.

LADY C. • It can't be a dream, I'm wide awake

JOHN: I don't believe I've quite got away yet really
I can still hear the guns (*He suddenly bends and clutches
his stomach*) Oh God!

LADY C. (*whispering*): Does it hurt terribly, my
darling?

JOHN: Just a bit—it'll pass off.

LADY C. Keep very still for a minute

JOHN Darling Mum!

LADY C. Will it matter if I turn on the reading
lamp? It's so dark and I do want to see you

JOHN makes a movement

Don't move I can do it with my left hand

She switches on a small lamp on the table

There! That's better!

JOHN (*smiling*) Much better (*He fidgets a little*)

LADY C. Are you uncomfortable?

JOHN A little bit

LADY C. I'll leave go of you if you promise not to
go away again, without warning me.

JOHN I promise (*He kisses her*)

JOHN gets up and sits opposite to her at the table

Good old Canfield! (*He puts his hand across the table
and takes hers*)

LADY C. I got it out yesterday

JOHN Without cheating?

LADY C. (*shaking her head*) No

JOHN (*looking out of the window*) How lovely and
quiet it is!

LADY C. (*in a strained voice*) Oh darling! You
weren't in very great pain were you, when—

JOHN No—hardly any at all

LADY C. They said you couldn't have been because

it was all over so quickly, but I wasn't sure.

JOHN : Don't let's think about that.

LADY C. : A little of course, like just now, that can't be helped. (*She suddenly crumples on to the table with her head in her arms.*)

JOHN (*stroking her hair*) : Mum—don't—please, don't!

LADY C. (*brokenly*) : I'm a silly old fool, wasting precious time—

JOHN : It doesn't matter about time, really it doesn't—don't cry!

LADY C. : I'm not crying, it's something inside twisting horribly like it did years ago when—when—I couldn't cry then, I tried to because I thought it would be a relief, but it was no use, I couldn't, not for ages, and then only over stupid trivial things. (*She raises her head and sits back in her chair.*) Oh Johnnie—how dreadfully tired you look!

JOHN : We all look tired I'm afraid.

LADY C. : Why didn't you come sooner?

JOHN (*surprised*) : Sooner? I wasn't hit until a few minutes ago.

LADY C. : Thirteen years ago.

JOHN (*wondering*) : Oh!

LADY C. : Didn't you know?

JOHN : I thought you looked a little older, I wondered why.

LADY C. : I nearly died last year. I'm glad I didn't now, although I was sorry then. I should have missed you.

JOHN (*stricken*) : Oh Mum, that would have been unbearable. (*He clutches her hand again.*)

LADY C. : We'd have found each other somehow.

JOHN : Thirteen years—then—it's—it's—

LADY C. 1930

JOHN: How funny that sounds! I wonder where I've been!

LADY C. Can't you remember?

JOHN No—not a thing—I just swapped duties with Babe because he was so upset over Armitage, I hopped over the parapet with the covering party. It was all pretty quiet, then there was a flare and a lot of row suddenly, and I fell down and couldn't get up—I remember Perry looking at me though, just for a second, that was later, I was in the shelter again—he's there now—I can see him now—Perry—

LADY C. (*gripping both his hands*) No, no, darling—not yet—stay a little longer—not yet—please, please, please—(*Her voice breaks*)

JOHN (*quite naturally*) All right, darling—don't fuss

LADY C. I won't ask any questions—don't try to remember anything—ask me things and I'll answer, ordinary things, there have been tremendous changes everywhere, London looks quite different, you should see Regent Street, and Park Lane, and you can telephone to America quite easily, your father does it from his office every day—just as though he were speaking to the next room—

JOHN Father—where is he?

LADY C. In London. He comes down for weekends

JOHN Still the *Mercy*?

LADY C. Yes

JOHN Oh God!

LADY C. A million copies a day, I believe.

JOHN Is he just the same?

LADY C. He's fatter

JOHN: And is he still—I mean—still going on like he used to?

LADY C.: Yes. It's Viola Blake at the moment.

JOHN: Who's she?

LADY C.: A film actress, very pretty and quite civil, she pronounces it Viola.

JOHN: Sounds like a shaving stick!

LADY C.: They all came down here one day, a huge party of them with cameras and things and she acted all over the garden with a bright yellow face.

They both laugh a little.

JOHN: Did you mind?

LADY C.: No, I rather enjoyed it.

There is a pause for a moment.

JOHN (*quietly*): What's happened to Monica?

LADY C. (*swiftly*): Monica's married, Harriet's married, too, quite a nice little man called Stokes; he's a writer. Of course he's completely under her thumb, she was always domineering, even when you were children, wasn't she?

JOHN (*thoughtfully*): Yes.

LADY C.: And she's become a Christian Scientist, it's made her a trifle hard I think, but she seems very pleased with it. They have a child, poor little thing!

JOHN: How old is Harriet?

LADY C.: Forty-two.

JOHN: Then I must be forty?

LADY C.: No, darling, no, you're not. Don't think about that.

JOHN (*patting her hand*): Don't be frightened—go on talking! You said Monica was married.

LADY C.: Yes, she married very well.

JOHN: Who?

LADY C. · Bertie Chellerton

John. Oh!

There is a pause

Is she happy?

LADY C. · I believe so I haven't seen her for years, except in the illustrated papers

JOHN (*putting his head down*) I hope she's happy!

LADY C. · Please don't worry your head about her, darling She seems to lead a lovely life, full of excitements and fun

JOHN I can't help worrying a bit You see I'm still in love with her, I haven't had time not to be

LADY C. (*sadly*) I see

JOHN You never cared for her much, did you?

LADY C. I tried to like her, Johnnie, for your sake

JOHN Yes, I knew that

LADY C. · I never thought she was worthy of you

JOHN All mothers think that, don't they?

LADY C. Perhaps they do

JOHN It's inevitable, I expect A sort of jealousy without meaning to be

LADY C. · I expect it is

JOHN So she married Bertie Chellerton. I don't think I've ever seen him Is he nice?

LADY C. He looks quite pleasant.

JOHN Was she upset when—thirteen years ago?

LADY C. She wrote me a very sweet letter

JOHN I'm glad When did she marry?

LADY C. 1920

JOHN Ten years ago?

LADY C. Yes

JOHN It's nice to think she waited a bit I want to see her awfully

LADY C.: Oh no—no.

JOHN: Yes, mum, I must really, some time. Are they in love still?

LADY C.: I suppose so. They go to the Opera together, in the *Tatler*. (*She turns away.*)

JOHN (*impulsively*): I'm sorry, dearest. We won't talk about her any more.

LADY C.: You're right. I am jealous, really. You see, you're all I've got, all I've ever had. Harriet never counted as much as you did, and now, in this strange moment between life and death I want you all to myself, if I can't have you quite all, don't let me know, there's a dear boy! (*She tries to smile but doesn't succeed very well.*)

JOHN: I didn't mean to hurt you.

LADY C.: Don't be silly. Of course you didn't.

JOHN: I love you with all that's best in me—always.

He gets up and wanders about the room. LADY CAVAN watches him—he stops in front of a picture.

I remembered that picture the other day, quite suddenly, just before an attack, wasn't it funny? I saw it as clearly as though someone had held it in front of my nose.

LADY C.: You always liked it, even when you were tiny.

JOHN: It isn't very good really, is it?

LADY C.: Your Aunt Lilian painted it when she was a girl. I was brought up to think it very beautiful indeed. I suppose it is dreadfully amateurish.

JOHN: The sheep look a bit lop-sided. Apart from that, it's all right.

LADY C.: Sheep are very difficult.

JOHN picks up a book from the table by the bed.

JOHN (*looking at it wonderingly*): "Post-Mortem" by Perry Lomas—Perry Lomas!

LADY C. (*rising*) Put it down, darling—don't open it—please put it down. (*She comes over and takes it from him*)

JOHN: Is it new?

LADY C. Yes—it's only just published.

JOHN. Perry! So he came through all right

LADY C. He sent it to me, he said he thought you would have liked him to, I've got the letter somewhere, it's a bitter book and terribly sad.

JOHN: War?

LADY C. Mostly It's caused a great sensation. There's a rumour that it's going to be burnt publicly or something—

JOHN Good God, why?

LADY C. They say because it's blasphemous and seditious and immoral and lots of other things.

JOHN: They?

LADY C. The Press

JOHN: The Mercury?

LADY C. Yes I'm afraid the Mercury started all the trouble. Alfred Borrow wrote a violent attack on the front page. He's City Editor now and very important.

JOHN That slimy little man who used to be father's secretary?

LADY C.: Yes

JOHN What did you think of it, mother?

LADY C.: I could hardly bear it, but I think that was because of you. There are hundreds of war books now, they're the fashion, perhaps it's a good thing for those who forget too easily

JOHN: But they can't burn Perry's book just because

a rag like the *Mercury* makes a stunt of attacking it!

LADY C.: The *Mercury's* very powerful.

JOHN: So he's done it. He said somebody would. Give it to me, mother. I want to read it.

LADY C.: No, no, don't! What's the use?

JOHN: I must see father.

LADY C.: That wouldn't do any good. He doesn't care whether it's good or bad. It's just a scoop for the paper—

JOHN: Please give it to me.

LADY C.: Very well.

JOHN takes it and opens it at random.

JOHN: I think I know it somehow. Where is Perry—in London?

LADY C.: Yes. (*She smiles wistfully.*) You're going to see him, too, I suppose?

JOHN: I must. I must see them all, I've got to know what's happening.

LADY C. (*pleading*): I can tell you everything that's happening if you'll only stay here quietly with me. I can tell you better than they can—

JOHN: That's why I came back—to find out something.

LADY C.: There's nothing, nothing worth finding out—

JOHN: I must see for myself.

LADY C. (*holding him imploringly*): Listen to me, John, Johnnie, my darling, look at me! There's only one thing in the world worth finding, worth catching hold of, if only for a moment, and that's here in this room between you and me. Don't you understand, I don't want you to be hurt any more. Stay, ask me anything, I'll be able to answer, I know now, I'll tear the truth out

of infinity for you, even if I break my heart in doing it,
only stay, don't leave me !

JOHN You don't understand. There's a fraction of
a fraction of a second when you have a chance of seeing
everything for yourself if only you're strong enough
I must be strong enough. That's why it all happened,
that's why I'm here, I must try, even if I fail, I must try.
Let me go, darling, please !

LADY C. No, no, no !

JOHN I won't go back finally without seeing you
again I promise, I swear it.

LADY C. It isn't that Go back now finally, say
good-bye my own dearest and go, but don't open your
eyes—

JOHN (*looking at her strangely*) How much have you
lost ?

LADY C. Everything, but you.

JOHN Everything—everything you've ever be-
lieved ?

LADY C. Yes I'm too old to find new creeds and
the old ones are all gone, swept away !

JOHN God ?

LADY C. Whose God ? There are so many, and
they're all so foolish

JOHN Life Force, Force for Good, something ?

LADY C. Death Force, Force for Evil, Nothing,
equal in futility !

JOHN You're denying what you said just now
What of this that is here, between us ?

LADY C. A poor little spark, flickering for an
instant in Eternity What can that matter ?

JOHN : It does matter, it does, it must—

LADY C. Then stay, stay ! There's such a little

time left, and I'm so lonely.

JOHN : I'll come back, but I must go now—

LADY C. (*brokenly*) : Please, please !

JOHN (*taking her in his arms and holding her close, her face is hidden in his coat—he speaks very gently*) : Listen, Mum, you understand really. It's just because you're tired that you're finding it hard to be brave. I felt like that often enough in the Line, the effort to be made seems too big for one's strength, immense and frightening, but it isn't too big actually once you start. You must steel your heart, darling, and let me go. I know about War—a bitter and cruel knowledge, horror upon horror, stretched far beyond breaking point, the few moments of gallant beauty there, are not enough measured against the hideous ages of suffering ! Now, I must know about Peace, I must know whether by losing so much we have gained anything at all, or whether it was just blind futility like Perry said it was, I must know whether the ones who came home have slipped back into the old illusions and are rotting there, smug in false security, blotting out memory with the flimsy mysticism of their threadbare Christian legend, or whether they've had the courage to remember clearly and strike out for something new—something different ! I must know for myself, it's the urge inside me that's carved this brief moment out of Time. You do understand, don't you ?

LADY C. : Yes, dear. I understand. Come back once more, you promised !

JOHN : I'll come back. I swear it.

They cling together and for a moment it seems as though they are illumined by the vivid unnatural light of a Verey flare. There is a faint rumbling of guns in the

distance As the flare fades away LADY CAVAN speaks

LADY C.: Take care of yourself, my dearest dear!

In the gathering darkness, JOHN's figure moves away from her and disappears into the shadows. There is complete darkness for a moment, then twilight returns to the garden and then the room. LADY CAVAN is seated at the table by the window. She holds a pack of cards in her hand, and thoughtfully places one on those lying on the table as the LIGHTS FADE and—

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE III

The Chellerton's house in Mount Street. The scene is Monica's sitting-room. It is furnished in quite good ultra modern taste, although tending slightly to exaggeration.

When the curtain rises MONICA is lying on the sofa attired in rather bizarre pyjamas, which, in her epoch, have taken the place of tea-gowns and negligees. She is reading "Vogue," smoking and listening to a phonatope; one of the new kind which has been set with twelve records and seems to show no signs of flagging. MONICA is not exactly handsome, nor pretty, but somehow brilliant looking. She has the reputation of being witty and her parties are always successful. JOHN is standing at the head of the sofa just behind her, she hasn't seen him yet and goes on reading. He comes slowly down to the foot of the sofa.

JOHN : Hallo, Monica !

MONICA (*looking up*) : My God !

JOHN : Don't be frightened, please !

MONICA (*wide-eyed, staring at him*) : John ?

JOHN : Yes, I've come back for a little.

MONICA (*opening and shutting her eyes rapidly*) : I'm stark staring mad !

JOHN (*wonderingly*) : You have changed—tremendously !

MONICA : I suppose this is a dream ?

JOHN Not exactly, at least, I don't know, perhaps for you it is!

MONICA What else could it be?

JOHN Some sort of magic.

MONICA (*rallying*) I don't know what to say quite.

JOHN Are you pleased to see me?

MONICA I don't know, it's such a shock—(*her voice softens*) Yes, of course I'm pleased to see you—dear John

She puts out her hand with a slight effort, JOHN takes it and she jerks it away again reluctantly

JOHN I wish you wouldn't be frightened!

MONICA I'm not. Not exactly frightened, but you must admit it's a little shattering for me

JOHN I suppose it must be

MONICA I expect it's the effect of all those damned war books, getting on my nerves, I'll take some aspirin when I wake up. I wish I could remember when I went to sleep—it is after dinner, isn't it?

JOHN Yes (*He looks at his watch*) It's just nine.

MONICA Have you dined?

JOHN Yes, a little while ago

MONICA You look awfully tired. Would you like a drink or something? (*She laughs*) Oh—it seems funny offering a ghost a drink!

JOHN I'm not quite a ghost yet, and I should like some brandy

She rises and moves over to the bell, never taking her eyes off him

MONICA (*pressing the bell*) Do sit down, John dear—you can sit down, can't you?

JOHN Could we stop the gramophone first?

MONICA I'd forgotten it was going (*She stops it*)

JOHN: Does it go on playing for ever?

MONICA: Practically!

He comes over to it.

You see that sinister little arm keeps on slapping them on and snatching them off all by itself, horrid, isn't it?

JOHN: Good idea really, saves all that business of winding.

MONICA: It's certainly convenient, but rather scare making, don't you think? Everything's absolutely terrifying nowadays. I'm seriously thinking of going into a monastery.

She said this at dinner a few nights ago and everybody laughed. JOHN smiles, rather absently.

JOHN: Oh, Monica! (He sits down.)

MONICA (*sensing disapproval*): What's the matter?

JOHN: Nothing.

MONICA: Cigarette? (*She offers him a box.*)

JOHN (*looking at her as he takes one*): Yes—thanks.

She lights it for him as DRAKE, the butler, enters.

DRAKE: You rang, my lady?

MONICA: Yes, bring some brandy, please. (To JOHN.) Would you like some coffee?

JOHN: No, thank you.

MONICA (*to DRAKE*): Just brandy then.

DRAKE: Very good, my lady.

He goes out.

MONICA (*conversationally*): He's called Drake. Isn't he sweet?

JOHN (*smiling*): Frightfully sweet.

MONICA: Once when we were dining out we saw him in a very grand car in Eaton Square, and Eggie said 'Drake is going West, lad.' You'll like Eggie, he's terribly funny.

JOHN Who's Eggie?

MONICA Eggie Brace. He's Lord Verilow's son, you know, our old friend impoverished nobility, very enjoyable. Eggie's one of your father's toadies, he writes snappy gossip for the *Mercury*. You must have seen him, he's always with your father.

JOHN I haven't seen father yet

MONICA Darling Jumbo! We all worship him, particularly when he comes over Napoleonic—he's too lovely

JOHN I remember now Maisie Lorrimer used to call father "Jumbo"

MONICA (*surprised*) Maisie Lorrimer! Why she's been dead for years, she fell out of something or other

JOHN Lots of things happen in thirteen years!

MONICA (*hurriedly*). You'll see Eggie soon. He and Kitty Harris are coming to fetch me, we're going to a gloomy party at the Friedlanders (*She passes*) Will Kitty and Eggie be able to see you as well, I mean, if they come before I wake up?

JOHN Yes, I expect so Drake saw me all right, didn't he?

MONICA You can never tell with Drake. He has such perfect manners If he came in and found John the Baptist playing the gramophone without his head, he wouldn't flicker an eyelash! We'll see how many glasses he brings

JOHN laughs DRAKE re-enters with a tray on which there are two big glasses and a decanter. He pours some brandy into one and hands it to MONICA.

Then he pours some into the other glass and hands it to

JOHN

JOHN Thank you

DRAKE *goes out.*

MONICA : There now ! He probably thinks you're going to a fancy dress ball or something.

JOHN : Monica !

MONICA : Yes, John ?

JOHN : Come off it.

MONICA : What do you mean ?

JOHN : There's so much to say—we haven't said anything yet.

MONICA (*turning away*) : I don't understand.

JOHN : Yes, you do. You must, inside, you can't have changed as much as all that.

MONICA : You're not approving of me, are you ?
(She laughs.)

JOHN : I haven't seen you yet.

MONICA : You mustn't be pompous, dear.

JOHN : Isn't it any use ?

MONICA (*irritably*) : Isn't what any use ?

JOHN : How old are you ?

MONICA : Thirty-three, and doing nicely thank you.

JOHN : I keep on seeing you as you were and then trying to fit it in with you as you are.

MONICA : This isn't a very comfortable dream !

JOHN : Don't shut me out, it's awfully important. I've only got a little while.

MONICA : I'm not shutting you out. I'm delighted to see you again. I've just told you.

JOHN : Have you any children ?

MONICA : No.

JOHN : What a shame !

MONICA : Why ? Do you think I ought to have ?

JOHN : Not if you don't want to.

MONICA : I'm not very good at children, you know.

Not that I don't like them, I do really, when they're funny and nice

JOHN (*smiling*). And other people's?

MONICA. Exactly. Violet Furlough's children for instance. They adore me, and I play with them for hours. They always look forward to the week-ends that I'm going to be down there. But I'm afraid I can only be maternal in small doses

JOHN I see

MONICA You don't. You've got a Victorian look in your eye

JOHN Should we have had children if we'd married, I wonder?

MONICA (*in a softer voice*) You were terribly in love with me, weren't you?

JOHN. Yes

MONICA Poor old John!

JOHN Weren't you, with me?

MONICA Of course. You knew I was, but it's a long time ago, isn't it? (*Her voice rises slightly*) Isn't it?

JOHN For you

MONICA You mean—you're still—still there?

JOHN I'm afraid so

MONICA I see.

There is silence for a moment

JOHN I was a fool to come.

MONICA I feel awfully stupid, as if I were going to cry

She rises abruptly and goes to the window.

JOHN Nothing to cry about

MONICA I'm not so sure

JOHN Monica!

She doesn't answer.

Monica!

MONICA (*turning*): Don't speak, please. I want to wake up, I want to wake up!

JOHN: I'll go. (*He gets up.*) I don't want to upset you.

MONICA: John—don't go—please!

The door opens and KITTY HARRIS and EGGLIE BRACE enter. KITTY is young and pretty and consistently silly. EGGLIE is moon-faced and has a slight stammer which never interferes with his good remarks and enhances some of his bad ones.

KITTY: Darling, you're not dressed or anything! (She sees JOHN.) Oh!

MONICA (*mechanically*): Kitty, this is John Cavan—Lady Catherine Harris, Lord Brace—

KITTY (*shaking hands vaguely*): How do you do—

EGGLIE: How do you do! (*Then to MONICA.*) Jumbo's in great form to-night. He's gone trumpeting off to one of his conferences surrounded by bishops and deans. We've got the Home Secretary to stop all sales of this Lomas book. That's what they're all up to to-night. They want to get it publicly burnt like J-J-Joan of Arc. The *Mercury* Printing Presses are fairly bouncing up and down like V-v-virgin B-brides, waiting to be ravished by the story. Poor Lomas is for it all right, I haven't read the damned thing myself, but it's full of bits from all accounts—

KITTY: I've read it, it's marvellous! I found a copy tucked away in Hatchard's just before the fuss started—it's probably worth millions now!

EGGLIE: Can't we have a drink or something?

MONICA: Of course.

She goes towards the bell but DRAKE has anticipated her and enters with a large tray of drinks which he places on a side table and exits.

KITTY stretches on the parasol so the ensuing conversation is naturally pitched rather more loudly

EGGIE (*carrying a whisky bottle as JOHN*): Drink?

JOHN No thanks.

EGGIE Kitty?

KITTY (*using her hip-stick*): Yes, please. Small one!

EGGIE You'll have to hurry, Monica. You know what Millie is over her musical parties

KITTY Poor Millie! Her house is much too small—

EGGIE Even for e-c-chamber music.

Everybody laughs except JOHN

(To MONICA) Drink?

MONICA No, I've got some brandy somewhere.

EGGIE (*continuing the conversation*) And her head's much too big

MONICA I'm not coming to the Friedlanders!

KITTY Monica!

MONICA I want to talk to John.

KITTY Bring him, too

EGGIE (*to JOHN*) Yes, it wouldn't take you long to change, would it?

JOHN These are the only clothes I have.

KITTY Do come, it's sure to be agony

JOHN No thanks, really—I think I'd feel out of it.

KITTY How absurd! You could talk about the War. Nobody who can talk about the War's out of it now, are they, Eggie?

EGGIE I think the War's a bore, a b-b-bore war.

KITTY : Not very funny, my sweet, that will do for your column.

MONICA : I quite agree. It is a great bore, but John and I are not going to talk about the War, are we, John ?

JOHN : I think I must be getting along, Monica. I've got to see Perry.

MONICA : Who on earth's Perry ?

JOHN : Just an old friend of mine, nobody you know.

EGGIE (*to MONICA*) : What's happened to Freddy ?

MONICA : He's in Paris with Laura.

EGGIE : Somebody told me that, but I couldn't b-b-bring myself to believe it—you're beautifully composed about it.

MONICA : I don't see any reason to be anything else.

KITTY : Monica's always composed, aren't you, dear ?

EGGIE : Hard as nails, utterly ruthless, when I-I-love is o-o-over how little lovers thingummy bob——

MONICA (*sharply*) : Shut up, Eggie !

KITTY : Freddy's a fool anyhow ! I always thought so.

MONICA : You didn't always show it !

KITTY : And Laura's a half-wit, they're admirably suited.

EGGIE : Go carefully, Kitty. There may be t-t-tendrils of affection still twining round Monica's stony heart ! I shall write a dear little bit about Freddy and Laura being in Paris. Where are they—at the Ritz ?

MONICA : You're too late, it's already in the *Standard*.

EGGIE : Did Burford ring you up ?

MONICA : Don't be ridiculous, Eggie ! As if I'd

talk about my private affairs to the Press.

EGGIE The Press seems to have a pretty good rough idea of them!

KITTY Don't quarrel, you two!

EGGIE (*injured*) Nobody ever gives me any news, I always have to scavenge round for it, it's a great mistake writing about people you know.

MONICA (*sharply*) If it was really *writing* it wouldn't matter so much!

KITTY (*taking EGGIE's arm*): Give up, Eggie, Monica's remarkably snappy to-night

They both move away slightly towards the pianoforte

JOHN (*quietly to MONICA*) Good-bye!

MONICA (*with sudden intensity, unheard by the others*): Please stay—you owe it to me—you haven't given me a chance yet!

JOHN Get rid of them—for God's sake!

KITTY (*coming down*) Darling—do hurry!

MONICA I told you, I'm not coming

KITTY Just for a few minutes?

MONICA No—(*Almost wildly*)—No!

KITTY Well, you needn't snap my head off just because you've got a bit of private nonsense on. (*She looks at JOHN and laughs*) I do hope he'll be a comfort, darling, he looks a bit gloomy to me—Eggie!

EGGIE What?

KITTY Put on the "Blue Danube" dear and come away!

EGGIE What for? (*He stops the pianoforte*)

KITTY Monica wants us to go!

EGGIE How inhospitable! Is this true, Monica?

MONICA Yes I may join you later, I don't know, I'll see.

KITTY (*catching EGGIE's arm*): Come on!

EGGIE (*gulp ing down his drink*): All right!—"Im-poverished Peer asked to leave Lady Chellerton's House in Mount Street." "Full story on Page 8." (*He waves genially to JOHN.*) See you later!

KITTY (*to MONICA*): Good-bye, darling—have fun!
(*To JOHN.*) Good-bye!

JOHN: Good-bye!

MONICA: Good-bye!

EGGIE and KITTY go out.

MONICA: I'm sorry, John.

JOHN: What for?

MONICA: All that.

JOHN: Why—it's part of your life, isn't it?

MONICA: They don't matter a bit.

JOHN: Don't apologise for them, that makes it worse.

MONICA: I hate them, particularly Eggie, he's got a mind like a third-rate housemaid.

JOHN: You said he was a darling a little while ago, and terribly funny!

MONICA: He can be sometimes, but he wasn't to-night.

JOHN: That was my fault. I was the wrong note.

MONICA: Yes, that's probably true. (*She flings herself down on the sofa.*) Anyhow you've managed to make me utterly miserable if that's any comfort to you.

JOHN: I'm sorry!

MONICA: Why did you come? You might have known it would be a failure.

JOHN: How could I know? I've been too far away to know anything but the more concrete horrors.

MONICA: You're not going to begin about the War,

are you? I couldn't bear it

JOHN: Why couldn't you bear it?

MONICA Because it's over and done with and boring to the last degree.

JOHN: It isn't over and done with for me!

MONICA You're dead, don't be silly, you're dead!

JOHN. I couldn't die until I was free.

MONICA What do you mean?

JOHN You've made it just a little easier for me, only a few more minutes left, I must go—

He goes towards the door. Monica rises swiftly and intercepts him

MONICA No, no, forgive me, I didn't mean it. I wouldn't have talked like that if I hadn't been puzzled and bewildered and scared! Give me a chance to explain, I can't change back all in a minute, but I'll try I swear I will, if you want me to, enough!

JOHN (*gently*) It doesn't matter, Monica. It's only my personal view! You go your own way and don't be upset. You've got a life to live, I haven't. Don't worry about me!

MONICA I loved you! I swear I did. (*She is crying now*)

JOHN (*leading her down to the sofa*). There, there! That's all right—I know you did—

MONICA (*suddenly clinging to him*) I could love you again, if you wanted me—

JOHN (*drawing away*) No, Monica, don't say that!

MONICA (*wildly*) It's true

JOHN (*remotely*) Our love wouldn't meet now, there's a gap of too many years!

MONICA (*whispering*) John, don't be so dreadfully stern and sure Kiss me, just once, won't you? Even

if it's only to say good-bye—won't you, please?

JOHN: Of course.

He kisses her, she twines her arms round his neck and relaxes in his embrace. BERTIE CHELLERTON enters.

He is amiable-looking, about forty, a trifle puffy from good living, but possessing a certain charm. He is obviously embarrassed but covers it more or less successfully after the first start. MONICA and JOHN break away.

BERTIE: I'm so sorry to come bursting in like that. I'd no idea you were at home!

MONICA (*with an effort*): It doesn't matter, dear. John, this is my husband—John Cavan!

BERTIE (*shaking hands*): Of course. Monica's often spoken of you. How are you?

JOHN (*suddenly*): I'd like to apologise—you see Monica and I were engaged once, years ago, and—and—we hadn't seen each other since. That's why—

BERTIE: I know—I know—don't say any more, please. It was my fault for blundering in. Monica and I understand one another perfectly, we've been married too long to be anything but just good friends. You were killed in 1916, weren't you?

JOHN: 1917.

BERTIE: Yes, of course. There was a great pal of mine in your show—Teddy Filson. Do you remember him?

JOHN: Yes. Quite well.

BERTIE: I must be getting along now. I'm supposed to be at the Pavilion with Mary and Jack. They've got a box or something. I was bringing this telegram to put on your desk, Monica, it's from the Burdon's asking us down on the 20th. D'you want to go?

MONICA : I'll think about it and let you know later
 BERTIE Right. (*He smiles at JOHN*) Cheerio !
(Then under his breath to MONICA.) For God's sake, lock
 the door next time That was damned awkward !

He goes out

There is a silence for a moment. JOHN starts

laughing—a strained laugh

MONICA Don't, John, please !

JOHN I can't help it It's funny.

MONICA You'll never forgive me now, will you ?

JOHN Forgive you ?

MONICA You know what I mean

JOHN There's nothing to forgive, honestly there
 isn't It hasn't anything to do with it

MONICA I'm sorry I've let you down.

JOHN I don't matter It's you that matters

MONICA (*smiling*) : Mattered—past tense, please—
 mattered once, a long while ago, not any more, not now

JOHN (*suddenly sitting down and burying his face in his hands*) · Oh God ! It's all so silly !

MONICA · Don't be miserable, please—if you'd come
 back all right years ago and we'd married as we'd
 planned, it might all have been different

JOHN (*looking up*) I wonder !

MONICA This won't last, will it—this feeling that
 I've got now ? It'll pass away when I wake up, won't
 it ?

JOHN · I expect so

MONICA I couldn't bear it if it didn't I just
 couldn't bear it—I wish you wouldn't look at me like
 that

JOHN · Good-bye, Monica dear I'm really going
 this time, and I won't worry you again ever, even in

dreams, I promise! Never think I regret having loved you, I'm grateful to you for a lot of happiness. It was jolly planning a future, it passed the time.

MONICA: Yes, it passed the time all right—and that's all I've done ever since, though I don't know what right you have to accuse me. Oh, I know you didn't actually in so many words, but your eyes did—you died young, who are you to judge, you hadn't yet found out about everything being a bore.

JOHN quietly goes away, but she goes on talking without seeing him—the LIGHTS begin to fade.

I don't see why I shouldn't try to justify myself really. I'm quite nice and kind to people. I don't cheat or lie, or steal, I like being popular and having people in love with me; why shouldn't I? There's no harm in that, really, all the fuss that's made about having affairs, it's silly! I might have had an affair with you just now if Bertie hadn't come in. Funny having an affair with a ghost—funny having an affair with a ghost——

She speaks the last few lines in the pitch dark, the panatrophe blares out, but the LIGHTS don't go up.

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

The scene is PERRY LOVIES' sitting-room. It is poorly furnished, there is a bed on one side of the stage, and a few books about. One or two easy armchairs and a table in the centre.

When the curtain rises PERRY is seated at the table writing. There is a tray of half-eaten food which he has pushed on one side. Lying on the table just beyond the paper upon which he is writing, is a revolver. PERRY is still thin and nervy looking. His hair is streaked with grey. JOHN appears in the pool of light shed over the table from a hanging lamp.

JOHN Perry?

PERRY (not looking up): Yes?

JOHN: It's me—John!

PERRY (peering at him) Oh, sit down.

JOHN: Don't you recognise me?

PERRY Wait a minute till I've finished this.

JOHN: But, Perry!

PERRY Wait, wait a minute, please!

JOHN sits down. PERRY goes on writing. He finally reads through the letter he has finished, and putting it into an envelope, seals it down. He sits back and looks at JOHN, then he smiles.

I thought you'd have vanished by the time I looked up again.

JOHN: I'm awfully glad to see you, Perry.

PERRY Well, you're only just in time.

JOHN: What do you mean?

PERRY (*taking up the revolver*): Good-bye!

He is about to place it to his head when JOHN leans over and grabs his arm.

JOHN: Stop—no—not yet—Perry.

PERRY: So you're tangible, that's surprising!

JOHN: Give me that gun.

PERRY: If this is my brain beginning to snap I'm damned if I'm going to wait and watch it happen. (*He tries to lift his arm again.*) I'm going to anticipate it!

JOHN (*struggling with him*): Not yet, please not yet, Perry.

PERRY: Let me go, damn you!

JOHN: Don't be a fool!

PERRY: That's not being a fool, there are thousands of ways of being a fool in life, but not in death. You must know all about that.

JOHN: I don't, I don't know anything, but I'm beginning to. It isn't as swift as you think.

PERRY: Don't put me off, there's a good chap. It's all I've got to look forward to.

JOHN: Just a few minutes can't make any difference.

PERRY: Why should I listen to you? My mind's made up. I'm all ready.

JOHN: I want to know why you're doing it.

PERRY: That's easy.

JOHN: Tell me. Put that revolver down, and tell me.

PERRY: Heart to heart talk with spook, very difficult.

JOHN: Please!

PERRY: You always got your own way when you were alive, it's clever of you to keep it up when you're dead. (*He puts the revolver down.*) There! Would

you like a drink, I believe there's still some left?

JOHN No thanks

PERRY (*looking at him curiously*) I remember you so clearly, in those last few moments lying on the bunk I hated it, seeing you brought in like that It came so unexpectedly After all there hadn't been any heavy shelling, everything was quiet and you were so very very alive always, even when you were tired What have you been up to all this time?

JOHN I don't know, waiting, I suppose

PERRY Where?

JOHN I don't know that either

PERRY Haven't you met any spirits yet, socially?

JOHN Not one

PERRY Haven't you even been in touch with Sir Oliver Lodge?

JOHN No

PERRY Well you ought to be ashamed of yourself, a fine upstanding ghost of your age, shilly shallying about and getting nowhere I don't know what the spirit world's coming to, and that's a fact!

JOHN It's what I was talking to you about, the infinitesimal moment, don't you remember? You see it's "now" for me and "then" for you

PERRY (*flippantly*) And "two for tea and tea for two!"

JOHN Don't evade me by being flippant, Perry, it's not kind

PERRY You're so earnest, so very earnest

JOHN You can't talk, you're earnest enough to commit suicide

PERRY True—true!

JOHN And you won't even tell me why!

PERRY It's difficult to tabulate it in words

JOHN: Try. I do want to know.

PERRY: Curioser nor a cat!

JOHN: Why, Perry, why?

PERRY: A sort of hopelessness which isn't quite despair, not localised enough for that. A formless, deserted boredom, everything eliminated, whittled right down to essentials, essentials which aren't there.

JOHN: Are you sure?

PERRY: Yes, quite sure, for me, anyway.

JOHN: Personal view again.

PERRY: There's nothing else, that's all there is for any of us.

JOHN: No, you're wrong. There must be something more.

PERRY: Still floundering about after ultimate truths? Really, Master John, you're dead enough to know better.

JOHN: I'm beginning to wish I were.

PERRY: Why?

JOHN: I'm getting scared. I wasn't when I started.

PERRY: What's upset you?

JOHN: Change and decay. (*He laughs suddenly.*)

PERRY: Oh good! Splendid! You're coming along nicely.

JOHN: I thought that would please you.

PERRY: It doesn't please me exactly, but it's interesting.

JOHN: I suppose it is.

PERRY: Where did you start?

JOHN: Mother!

PERRY: How did that go? How did you find her?

JOHN: Strong and clear as always.

PERRY: That's the only form of sex that really holds.

JOHN (*with sudden fury*): Go to hell! You'll never find peace, not in a million deaths

PERRY Don't get rattled!

JOHN Your bitterness is too bitter, deep down in your heart, nullifying any chance you might have.

PERRY You mustn't be superior just because you've got a mother I haven't Never have had since I was two No compromise for me.

JOHN (*looking down*) I'm sorry.

PERRY: So you bloody well ought to be. Coming it over me with your mother love, and Christmas decorations and frosted robins!

JOHN Shut up—do shut up! (*He buried his face in his hands*)

PERRY Well, who else? Who else have you seen?

JOHN Why should I tell you? You won't understand, I don't like you enough really!

PERRY You used to

JOHN That was different

PERRY And you've remembered to come and see me in your brief moment.

JOHN I had to come.

PERRY Why? It couldn't have been admiration of my point of view, reverence for my brain, you always thought me unbalanced.

JOHN I feel sort of sorry for you

PERRY Very kind I'm sure. Lady Bountiful bringing me a basket of goodies from the grave.

JOHN Don't misunderstand me. Not that sort of sorry

PERRY You're gibbering, old dear, just gibbering Not being quite honest trying to fit half truths together, but they're too jagged and unmanageable Better stop

trying and come off your perch.

JOHN: What do you mean?

PERRY: I know why you're here, even if you don't.

JOHN: Tell me then!

PERRY: A gesture to memory, rather a gallant gesture, particularly from you, a farewell salute to things that have lain unsaid between us.

JOHN (*embarrassed*): Oh, Perry! Don't be such an ass.

PERRY: It's true! Nothing to be ashamed of. Look at me, through the me that's here, back to the me that you knew, and remember a little and be nice, because—because I'm feeling pretty low really. (*He looks fixedly at JOHN smiling, but his eyes are filled with tears.*)

JOHN (*wonderingly*): Vulnerable, over me?

PERRY: I never said I wasn't vulnerable.

JOHN: So that's why I came.

PERRY: I think so.

JOHN: Youth is a long way away, isn't it?

PERRY: Yes, it doesn't matter any more.

JOHN: Oh God! What a muddle!

PERRY (*gently*): You haven't answered my question. Who else have you seen?

JOHN: Nobody.

PERRY (*smiling*): Liar!

JOHN: Nobody I expected to see anyhow.

PERRY: Monica Chellerton, I suppose!

JOHN: Do you know her?

PERRY: No, I know of her. I remembered that you were engaged to her when I saw of her marriage years ago—I've watched her progress since then. Did she let you down very hard?

JOHN. I don't think, perhaps, it was altogether her fault.

PERRY: What did you expect?

JOHN I don't know.

PERRY: Why wasn't it her fault?

JOHN Circumstances, environment, money, all those silly people hemming her in.

PERRY She could get out if she wanted to.

JOHN Not as easily as all that

PERRY Why are you making excuses for her? It isn't her that you love, you'd stored up a pretty little sentimental memory, separated from reality by war, then you came back and took her by surprise before she had time to play up Damned unfair I call it!

JOHN Do you mean she was always playing up, even before?

PERRY I expect so, it's her job

JOHN She loved me once

PERRY I'm sure she did, as much as she could. Don't worry about her, there are deeper sorrows than that Hang around a bit longer and you'll see

JOHN I know about your book.

PERRY Do you?

JOHN Is it true that they're going to burn it?

PERRY I expect so

JOHN Damn their eyes!

PERRY They haven't got any to damn! They can't see, they can only grope with their instincts and the principal one, as usual, is fear They're afraid my book might start something, that if they let it get by, it might encourage someone else to write a better one, clearer, more concise in simpler phrases I tried to be as simple as possible, but I didn't succeed, that's what's

wrong with the book. You have to talk to dogs in bone language and it's difficult, particularly if you don't care for dogs.

JOHN: Is it because of the book that you're going to—to—

PERRY: Kill myself?

JOHN: Yes. Have they got you down? Is that why?

PERRY: Lord no! I'm not killing myself because of the book, that's trivial compared with the rest. It was true you see, as true as I could make it, and that's that. I've got it out of me. It was received as I expected it to be received—outraged squeaks and yells. But none of that matters, even to me, now.

JOHN: What is it then?

PERRY: Deeper than that, far, far deeper. One little ego in the Universe, mine, humiliated and shamed into the dust by being alive. You're all right, you're safe. You're naturally idealistic, I never was. You're young. I never was. You're mercifully dead. This coming back to see is all very well, a good trick but no more. It's really as futile as everything else because as usual there's been a blunder. You're not the right sort to come back, you'll never see, your eyes are too kind. You can try, that's all, but you won't get far.

JOHN: It's nerves, this hatred in you. Nerves, you're ill! You've been working yourself to death over writing this book and now it's done, you're suffering from a reaction. You should go away quietly into the country somewhere and rest.

PERRY: Oh, John, good old John, how typical of you! Do you remember that night when somebody or other died and I was a bit upset and you told me to

control my mind? You gave me a list of things to think about, a jolly little list, sleep, warmth, drink, food, self-preservation. You gave me that list, without a trace of irony, do you remember?

JOHN I was right. This is the smash I was warning you about, but it's come later than I thought.

PERRY You said that you believed something would come out of the war, that there was a reason for all that ignorant carnage, all that vitality and youth dying as bravely as it could not knowing why, years and years hence, you said, we shall see, something will rise out of the ashes, didn't you, didn't you?

JOHN I still believe that.

PERRY Hurry then, don't waste time with me.

JOHN It may be that I've come back too soon.

PERRY (*rising irritably*) Come back again then. If your curiosity is tenacious enough, it can hold you indefinitely suspended between the grave and the stars, you can keep on coming back, but don't stay now, you've picked a bad moment.

JOHN Why so bad? What is it? What's happening?

PERRY Nothing's happening, really. There are strides being made forward in science and equal sized strides being made backwards in hypocrisy. People are just the same, individually pleasant and collectively idiotic. Machinery is growing magnificently, people paint pictures of it and compose ballets about it, the aesthetes are cottoning on to that very quickly because they're scared that soon there won't be any other sort of beauty left, and they'll be stranded with nothing to paint, and nothing to write. Religion is doing very well. The Catholic Church still tops the bill as far as

finance and general efficiency goes. The Church of England is still staggering along without much conviction. The Evangelists are screeching as usual and sending out missionaries. All the other sects are flourishing about equally. Christian Science is coming up smiling, a slightly superior smile, but always a smile. God is Love, there is no pain. Pain is error. Everything that isn't Love is error, like Hell it is. Politically all is confusion, but that's nothing new. There's still poverty, unemployment, pain, greed, cruelty, passion and crime. There's still meanness, jealousy, money and disease. The competitive sporting spirit is being admirably fostered, particularly as regards the Olympic games. A superb preparation for the next War, fully realised by everyone but the public that will be involved. The newspapers still lie over anything of importance, and the majority still believes them implicitly. The only real difference in Post War conditions is that there are so many men maimed for life and still existing, and so many women whose heartache will never heal. The rest is the same only faster, and more metricious. The War is fashionable now, like a pleasantly harrowing film. Even men who fought in it, some of them see in it a sort of vague glamour, they've slipped back as I knew they would. Come and see if you must, John. You can stand up under a few blows in the guts, you're strong in courage and true as far as you know, but what are you doing it for? Why not be content with the suffering you've had already out there. All the rest is unnecessary and doesn't help. Go back to your mother for the time that's left, say good-bye to her, be sweet to her as you're sweet to everybody and just a little sweeter, that may be worth something although it

passes in a flash A kid like you isn't going to do any good in all this muck. Hold close to your own love wherever it lies, don't leave it lonely while you wander about aimlessly in chaos searching for some half formulated ideal An ideal of what? Fundamental good in human nature! Bunk! Spiritual understanding? Bunk! God in some compassionate dream waiting to open your eyes to truth? Bunk! Bunk! Bunk! It's all a joke with nobody to laugh at it Go back to your mother while you can

JOHN Cheer up, Perry

PERRY You'll see, I'm right You'll see.

JOHN You've given yourself away a bit

PERRY How do you mean?

JOHN You laugh at me for being an idealist, but you're a greater one than I, far greater—

PERRY Magnificent sophistry, you'll be saying everything's God's Will in a minute

JOHN I'm only idealistic about individuals really, that's why I came back I can only see causes and effects through a few people, the people I love But you're different, capable of deeper depths and further heights, because your ideals catch at life itself, away beyond me Perry, far beyond, you've been clutching at a star beyond my vision, looking to a future that's too dim for me even to imagine It must be heartbreakin to be a poet!

PERRY Cheering my last moments, that's what you're doing, aren't you? (*He smiles rather slyly*)

JOHN (*picking up the revolver and banding it to him*) Here!

PERRY (*taking it*) Thanks What's a little death among friends?

JOHN: Better than life among enemies. Poor old Perry! I see that much.

PERRY: An epigram and from you, oh John, how glorious!

JOHN (*rising*): Good-bye, Perry!

PERRY (*rising also and standing above the table*): Thanks for coming. You've made a strange difference. I'm deeply deeply grateful!

JOHN suddenly puts his arms round PERRY tightly, then turns away and disappears into the shadows.

JOHN (*as he goes*): Good-bye, old dear!

PERRY (*huskily*): Cheero!

As the LIGHTS FADE, PERRY lifts the revolver to his head. He is smiling. The shot rings out in the dark.

CURTAIN

In the pitch darkness the voices of BABE ROBINS, TILLEY, SHAW, and PERRY are heard.

TILLEY: He's still breathing.

BABE (*hysterically*): Will he die—will he die?

SHAW: Shut up, Babe.

PERRY: He's not quite unconscious, look at his eyes.
I believe he opened his eyes.

SCENE V

Scene —The private office of SIR JAMES CAVAN in the "Daily Mercury" Building, London. The room is large and luxuriously furnished. The three windows look out over roof tops, and as it is evening, electric light signs can be seen flashing in the distance. The big table in the centre is placed in readiness for a conference. Notebooks and pencils at each place and chairs drawn up. On the sideboard there is an elaborate cold supper laid out. There is a sofa downstage left, and Sir James' desk downstage right. There are two or three telephones on it and neat piles of letters and papers. Far away, down below somehow can be heard the faint rumble of printing presses.

When the curtain rises SIR JAMES and ALFRED BORROW are seated on the sofa, Miss BEAVER is standing primly just above it with her note-book. SIR JAMES is fattish and pink and spread. ALFRED BORROW is also spread but in a different way. He is a meekly looking man. They are both in dinner jackets. Miss BEAVER is watery and pale, but obviously efficient, otherwise she would not be there. JOHN comes quietly in from the door downstage left. SIR JAMES stops talking abruptly and rises to his feet.

SIR JAMES: John! My son, my boy! (He very beautifully takes JOHN in his arms.)

JOHN (struggling away) Hallo, father!

SIR JAMES I can't speak in this great, great moment

I can't speak, my heart is too full !

JOHN : Is it ?

SIR JAMES (*with one eye on BORROW and MISS BEAVER*) : You have passed from life into death, and back again from death into life to see your old father——

BORROW *whispers something to Miss BEAVER and she makes a few shorthand notes.*

Borrow, this is my son, John, you remember him ? John, you remember Borrow, don't you ?

JOHN : Yes.

SIR JAMES : Borrow is now the live wire of the *Mercury*.

BORROW : This is very moving. I can only say welcome !

JOHN : How do you do ! Thank you so much. How do you do !

BORROW (*shaking hands*) : We need you. Men like you—England needs you, you must tell England everything.

SIR JAMES : Your mother will be so happy. So, so happy ! We must telephone her. Miss Beaver, get through immediately to her ladyship. How happy she will be !

JOHN : I've seen mother.

SIR JAMES : Good, splendid ! How happy it must have made her.

BORROW : Return of Sir James Cavan's only son after thirteen years ! His mother, a white-haired Patrician lady smiled at our special representative with shining eyes. "My son," she said simply. Just that, but in those two words the meed of mother-love was welling over.

JOHN (*impersonally*) : Worm, stinking little worm !

BORROW. A full page, nothing less than a full page. Have you any photographs of yourself aged two, then aged eight, then aged thirteen? Hurray for school-days! Then seventeen, just enlisted, clear-eyed and clean-limbed, answering your country's call. "We're out to win," said Sir James Cavan's son, smilingly. Just that, but in those simple words what a wealth of feeling, what brave brimming enthusiasm.

JOHN (*dreamily*) Filth—scavenging little rat!

BORROW "Death of Sir James Cavan's only son." "Thank God!" said Sir James Cavan huskily to our Special Representative, "he died fighting" Lady Cavan when interviewed was reserved and dry-eyed, her mother-grief was too deep for tears "He was my only son," she said clearly "Now he is gone, but he would like to think we are carrying on, so we will, we will carry on!" Just those few words, so simple, but oh, what a wealth of heroic suffering lay behind them!

JOHN. I can't touch you with words or blows, the nightmare is too strong

BORROW What do you think of the modern girl? What do you think of the longer skirts? Do you think bicycling women make the best wives? Do you think the Talkies will kill the Theatre? What do you think of the dear little Princess Elizabeth? Do you think this vogue of war literature will last?

He walks up and down followed closely and in step by Miss BEAVER, taking notes mechanically

We will off our hats to Sir Lawrence Weevil for saying "Thank God, we've got a Navy" We take off our hat to Lady Millicent Beauchamp for giving birth to a baby daughter We take off our hat to Cedric Bowleigh for making coloured paper toys and being photo-

graphed in the nude. We take off our hat to the Duchess of Lyme for appearing at the "Down with Cancer" matinee as the infant Samuel. We take off our hat to Lieutenant John Cavan for returning from Death; returning from the grave; returning from the other side; returning from the spirit world; returning from the hinterland; returning from the Beyond. (*He turns to SIR JAMES*) What do you think best?

SIR JAMES: Hinterland.

BORROW: Miss Beaver.

MISS BEAVER: Beyond.

BORROW: Returning from beyond the hinterland.

SIR JAMES: Sunday. Save it all for Sunday.

The telephone rings. MISS BEAVER goes to it.

MISS BEAVER (*at phone*): Yes. Just a moment. (*To SIR JAMES*) It's that painted strumpet, Viola Blake, Sir James.

SIR JAMES: Thank you, Miss Beaver. (*He goes to telephone.*)

MISS BEAVER (*relinquishing telephone*): I think she's drunk again.

SIR JAMES (*at phone*): Hallo! Yes, Viola; no, Viola; yes, Viola; no, Viola; yes, a conference. Very busy. Yes, darling; no, darling, later darling. Good-bye, darling.

SIR JAMES *hangs up the receiver and comes over to JOHN.*

Long exciting legs, my boy, but no brain.

BORROW: Miss Viola Blake in a private interview admitted that she only used plain cold cream and a loofah. "Exercise," she said, "is absolutely essential, every morning I ride and skip and play tennis and hunt in season. In the evenings I read and write and listen

to good music. If I marry it must be a strong good man who will understand me. I'm really very old-fashioned in spite of the parts I play. I never use hot or cold water, or soap or cosmetics or massage. Just plain cold cream and a loofah—cold cream and a loofah—away with blackheads—cold cream and a loofah!"

MISS BEAVER. Silly drunken harlot! Any more notes, Sir James?

SIR JAMES. Not at the moment, Miss Beaver, but I'd like you to wait. Have a glass of champagne? We'll all have a glass of wine. The others will be here in a moment.

MISS BEAVER. No champagne for me, thank you. Just plain cold cream and a loofah!

She laughs wildly and sits down in a corner. BORROW pours out three glasses of champagne and hands one to JOHN, ere to SIR JAMES and keeps the other himself.

SIR JAMES (*lifting his glass*) A Toast to the War, and the heroic part played in it by my son!

BORROW (*lifting his glass*) To the War!

JOHN To the War! (*He drains his glass*) More, please!

BORROW takes JOHN's glass and refills it.

SIR JAMES John, my boy, this is a great moment.

JOHN (*lifting his glass*) Here's to you, father. Liar, hypocrite, conscientious money grubber, political cheat, licentious sentimentalist—my father.

JOHN drinks

SIR JAMES (*softly*) Thank you, my boy, thank you—a great moment.

BORROW Lieutenant John Cavan drinks to his father "Father and I have always been good pals," he said to our representative "Even when I was so

high he was my ideal of what a man should be." Then this serious war-scarred young soldier gave one of his rare smiles. "I see no reason to change that early impression," he said. Such a simple unemotional sentence and yet what a wealth of pride and adoration lay behind it.

SIR JAMES : The Bishop should be here. Why is he so late ?

MISS BEAVER : It will be lovely to see a Bishop close to—what a lucky lucky girl I am !

BORROW : I can't think what's detaining the old fool !

SIR JAMES : And Lady Stagg-Mortimer !

MISS BEAVER : And Sir Henry !

JOHN : Lady Stagg-Mortimer. I remember her name—she gave her son !

SIR JAMES : A truly remarkable woman, deeply religious and a wonderful mother !

JOHN : We were talking about her a minute ago, reading that tripe. I'm glad she's coming. I want to see her.

SIR JAMES : The best type of womanhood in the world.

MISS BEAVER : Faded.

BORROW : Embittered.

SIR JAMES : Sexually repressed.

MISS BEAVER : Snobbish.

BORROW : Plain.

SIR JAMES : A truly remarkable woman !

The BUTLER enters.

BUTLER : Lady Stagg-Mortimer !

LADY STAGG-MORTIMER comes slyly into the room.
She is tall and thin like a scraggy Burne Jones. Her manner is alternatively ingratiating and authoritative.

She is in a russet evening gown—her voice is shrill and high. She shakes hands with SIR JAMES.

LADY S-M How do you do? I should like a tongue sandwich, but no sherry Sherry is the beginning of the end (To BORROW) How do you do? (She shakes hands—to JOHN) How do you do? (She shakes hands)

SIR JAMES My son—from beyond the hinterland!

LADY S-M How interesting! If you're going to stay I'm afraid we must erase your name from the Roll of Honour (She looks at Miss BEAVER) That woman is showing too much neck!

BORROW Too much neck, Miss Beaver—make a note

LADY S-M It's indecent! Merely intended to arouse the beast in men, that's all she does it for I know that kind, sly and quiet and utterly unreliable Where's the Bishop?

SIR JAMES Where's the Bishop, Borrow?

BORROW Miss Beaver, where's the Bishop?

MISS BEAVER (*going to telephone*) I'll find out

LADY S-M All that efficiency is all very well, but it's false Look at the way she moves her hips when she walks!

MISS BEAVER (*at telephone*) Where's the Bishop? Very well (*She hangs up*) He's downstairs washing his hands

LADY S-M Pert, too They're all alike, look at her hair

JOHN I want to go back now This is no use! I want to go back.

SIR JAMES You can't You must stay and help us, you're one of our most valuable allies, you shall speak

at the conference—you're fresh from the Great War—

BORROW: The Great War for Civilisation!

MISS BEAVER: The Great War for Freedom!

LADY S.-M.: The Great War for God!

SIR JAMES: You will be able to prove that this book by Perry Lomas is a living lie to be stamped out—defaming the memory of the Great War for humanity.

JOHN: What do you know of war? How did you see it, sitting at home here? Could any of the truth of it possibly have filtered through to your minds? How? By what channels? The newspapers, perhaps, the edited drama of cautious war correspondents, photographs of devastated areas, casualty lists, the things you were told by men on leave, men who spared you out of courtesy to your ignorance, who parried your idiotic questions because they were tired and wanted to rest a little. They said it was "All right, not so bad," that it would soon be over, and that you weren't to worry. And they went back, some of them almost gladly, because they loved you and were relieved to find how little you knew, others, less sentimental, were glad for different reasons. There's a quality in war that doesn't quite fit in with your gaudy labels, "God and Country!" "Martyred Belgium!" "The Great Sacrifice!" And all the rest of the cant you manufactured. There's a quality that you could never know, never remotely imagine, beyond your easy patriotism and your prayers. Beyond even what love you have, something intangible and desolately beautiful because it's based upon the deepest tragedy of all, disillusion beyond hope. Strangely enough your whole

religion is founded on that same tragedy, though in comparison with the war, the crucifixion becomes microscopic in importance Christ was one man, the War was millions

LADY S.M. You're a very interesting young man. You must come to lunch Can you manage next Tuesday, or if not you might dine on the 25th Quite a small party Don't forget

JOHN You're nothing but a silly hypocrite, so confused you don't even know yourself You did well in the War, didn't you? You ran a hospital, and organised gratifying charity matinees and screeched out patriotic speeches at the top of your lungs You even sang to the wounded. God help them! You achieved notable glory by writing an open letter to the Women of England when your son was killed "I Gave My Son," it was called. In that very heading you stole from him his voluntary heroism, you used his memory to exalt yourself in the eyes of sheep You implored other mothers to "give" their sons as you did, proudly and gladly You'd better pray quickly to your tin-pot God, pray that your son never knows, he'll hate you even more than he did when he died

LADY S.M. (*affably*) It always comforts me to think that there is a little bit of England out there in France that is me! Part of *me*!

JOHN I knew him, d'you hear me, I knew your son

LADY S.M. No one will ever know how we women of England suffered, suffered, suffered! We gave our loved ones, but proudly! We'd give them again—again—

JOHN He hated you, your loved one

LADY S.M. (*looking at Miss BEAVER*) Is it necessary

for that woman to be present during the conference, Sir James?

SIR JAMES: I'm afraid so, she must take notes.

LADY S.-M.: Tell her to remain in the corner then, and not to look at the Bishop. At all costs she mustn't look at the Bishop.

The Butler enters.

BUTLER (*announcing*): The Bishop of Ketchworth, Sir Henry Merstham.

The Bishop enters, followed by Sir Henry. The Bishop is genial and smiling. Sir Henry is tall and austere. He wears a monocle and carries his head a trifle on one side.

BISHOP: Forgive me, Sir James, I was detained. How do you do! Ah, Lady Stagg-Mortimer, what a pleasure to be sure. (*He shakes hands with Sir James and Lady Stagg-Mortimer.*)

SIR HENRY (*sepulchrally*): I was also detained, in the House, a very stormy meeting. (*He shakes hands*) Ah, Lady Stagg-Mortimer.

LADY S.-M.: Don't forget you're lunching with me on Tuesday, and dining on the twenty-fifth. Quite a small party.

SIR JAMES: You both know my Right Hand, don't you, Mr. Borrow?

BISHOP: Certainly. How do you do! (*He shakes hands with Borrow.*)

SIR HENRY (*doing the same*): How do you do!

SIR JAMES: This is my son from the Spirit World.

BISHOP (*shaking hands with John*): Very interesting. How do you do!

SIR JAMES (*to Sir Henry*): My son, from Out There.

SIR HENRY: Out where?

BISHOP : The War, my dear Henry, the War.

SIR HENRY . Oh, the War (*He shakes hands absently with JOHN*) I was in Paris quite a lot during the war, very depressing, but still I took up a philosophical attitude over the whole thing It was a time when we all had to pull our weight in the boat No use grumbling, no use grumbling at all.

BISHOP . Let us get on with the Conference. I must get to bed early, I have a Confirmation to-morrow at Egham Very tedious

SIR JAMES A glass of champagne ?

BISHOP No thank you, I never take it, except at weddings, as a special gesture

SIR JAMES Sir Henry ?

SIR HENRY Afterwards, I should like some afterwards

SIR JAMES Very well Lady Stagg-Mortimer !

He motions her to a seat at the table He also indicates chairs for the BISHOP and SIR HENRY.

BORROW sits on his left, with Miss BEAVER behind his chair

My son on my right

JOHN sits down

LADY S-M (*confidentially to SIR HENRY*) Such a nice looking boy He knew Alan you know, my Alan They were the closest friends We used to have such happy times when they were home on leave, just the three of us They treated me just as though I were one of them, not an old woman at all Oh, dear—
(*She sniffs, and fumbles for her handkerchief*)

SIR HENRY Dear Lady Stagg-Mortimer, memory is a cruel thing, is it not ? There—there—
(*He pats her hand*)

SIR JAMES (*rising to his feet at the head of the table*) : We have met together to-night in order to discuss a very serious matter, to wit, the rising tide of Sedition, Blasphemy and Immoral Thought which, under the guise of "War Literature," is threatening to undermine the youth of our generation.

SIR HENRY : Hear, hear !

LADY S.-M. : Excellently put.

BISHOP : Delightful, quite delightful !

SIR JAMES : In order to decide upon a course of action which will uproot this—this—er—canker in our midst once and for all, I have called together in secret conclave three of the most brilliant and most powerful people of our time. My old friend the Bishop of Ketchworth, whose finger is ever upon the religious pulse of the nation——

LADY S.-M. (*skittishly blowing him a kiss*) : Dear Bishop !

SIR JAMES (*continuing*) : Sir Henry Merstham, whose sane and uncompromising decisions in his capacity as adviser on the committee of censorship, have gone so far towards ridding our theatres and libraries of much that is base and unwholesome——

LADY S.-M. : All the same, Sir Henry, you should never have allowed them to produce that play about the Monk and the Chilian Ambassadress.

SIR JAMES : I never read the play, I was having a few weeks' holiday in Taormina.

LADY S.-M. : Very reprehensible !

BISHOP (*brightening up*) : Taormina—what an enchanting spot. Dear, dear, how time flies !

SIR JAMES (*continuing*) : Lady Stagg-Mortimer, whose indefatigable zeal in charity organizations, whose un-

swerving loyalty to her country, and whose passionate upholding of Englishwomen's rights, have made her name a byword, and her opinion a force to be reckoned with—

LADY S-M · Don't listen to him, Bishop, he's flattering me

SIR JAMES. And last, but by no means least—my son! My own flesh and blood, returned by a miracle from the valley of the shadow, to give us the value of his personal war experience, the benefit of that splendid spirit of patriotism which caused him to lay down his life for God and Country. And, if necessary, the strength of his youthful right arm, in defence of those heroes who died for us, and whose memory is being defamed daily by these writers of so-called War books, who treat England's victory as ignoble, and the glory of her sacrifices as futile.

JOHN (*quietly*) Death in War is above being defamed, even by you

BORROW (*dictating to Miss Beaver*) At the termination of Sir James Cavan's emphatic speech, John Cavan, his only son—

MISS BEAVER · Returned from B the H?

BORROW. Yes, returned from B the H—looked up at his father with a proud smile "Dad's right," he said. Just two simple words, but somehow, somehow, one understood.

BISHOP We're here to discuss a book, I understand, a very unpleasant book. Let's get on with it (*He smiles, and shuts his eyes*)

SIR JAMES You have all read this outrage?

BISHOP Outrage? Another outrage! Some poor little girl I suppose, set upon in a country lane by some

great hairy man! What happened—what happened?

He is quite excited, so SIR HENRY calms him.

SIR JAMES: I was referring to this book "Post-Mortem" by a man called Perry Lomas.

JOHN: A Poet.

LADY S.-M.: I've read it. I felt humiliated and ashamed.

JOHN: Good for you.

SIR HENRY: The book is a disgrace.

SIR JAMES: Bishop, I want your opinion on this book.

BISHOP: Which book?

SIR JAMES: "Post-Mortem" by Perry Lomas. I sent it to you.

BISHOP: Very kind of you, I'm sure. I appreciate it very much.

SIR JAMES: Have you read it?

BISHOP: Alas, no. You see I have been so very occupied, what with one thing and another, and now there's this Confirmation at Egham to-morrow——

SIR JAMES: Borrow. The Bishop of Ketchworth's opinion of "Post-Mortem."

BORROW: Miss Beaver. The Bishop of Ketchworth's opinion of "Post-Mortem."

MISS BEAVER (*producing a typewritten paper*): Here it is.

SIR JAMES (*taking it and handing it to the BISHOP*): Will you sign here, please?

BISHOP: Where are my glasses?

SIR HENRY (*picking them up from the table*): Here.

BISHOP: Thank you.

He puts them on and signs the paper, breathing rather heavily. When he has done so he sits back with

a sigh and closes his eyes again. SIR HENRY removes the glasses from his nose, and replaces them on the table. SIR JAMES takes the paper, and coughs, preparatory to reading it aloud.

SIR JAMES (*reading*) Letter from the Bishop of Ketchworth to the Editor of the *Daily Mercury* "Sir, with regard to the sentiments expressed in your editorial of May 14th concerning the book 'Post-Mortem,' I should like to say that I am in complete agreement with you on every point. Writing such as this, I will not dignify it by the name of Literature—"

BORROW *smiles and exchanges a glance with SIR JAMES*

—should not only be forbidden publication in a Christian country, but ignominiously burnt

SIR JAMES (*continuing*) It is a vile book and an ungodly book. Its content is blasphemous in the extreme—

JOHN Etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc.—signed
The Bishop of Katchbush"

SIR JAMES (*smiling*) My son! (*He pats his head.*)

JOHN (*jerking away*) Don't touch me

SIR HENRY Have you written to the Home Office?

SIR JAMES That is what I want you to do. I also want you to write a detailed letter to me for my next Sunday Edition.

SIR HENRY I gather that pressure has already been brought to bear upon the publisher to suspend the book pending a decision from the Home Office?

SIR JAMES Certainly, certainly

BORROW I myself have bought twenty copies, first editions, you understand. Possibly very valuable one day (*He smiles*)

SCENE V . . . POST-MORTEM

BISHOP (*waking up*): I have a first edition of "Alice in Wonderland."

LADY S.-M. (*rising*): Let me speak, I must speak now.

SIR JAMES: Borrow. Lady Stagg-Mortimer's speech.

BORROW: Miss Beaver. Lady Stagg-Mortimer's speech.

MISS BEAVER (*producing another typewritten sheet*): Here it is.

Borrow reads the speech, while Lady Stagg-Mortimer gesticulates and opens and shuts her mouth silently.

BORROW (*reading*): Open letter to the Women of England. "Women of England. Mothers, sweethearts and wives——

JOHN: Sisters, and cousins, and aunts, and prostitutes, and murderesses.

SIR JAMES (*fondly, petting his head*): My son! Proceed, Lady Stagg-Mortimer.

BORROW (*continuing*): —I have a message for you from my heart, the heart of a mother, who, like many of you, made the great sacrifice of her own flesh and blood in the great War for Humanity. Twelve years have passed since Britain's glorious victory was consummated in the signing of the Armistice. During those twelve years we have gone our ways, working and living, gallantly crushing down our sorrows, and, as a tribute to our glorious dead—carrying on!

JOHN: What else could you have done?

BORROW (*continuing*): —Now, at a critical period in the progress of our nation towards world supremacy, we are faced with a contingency so sinister in its potential evil, so imminently and insidiously perilous, that the very contemplation of it appals me. I refer to——

(Stops abruptly) Miss Beaver, what's that?

MISS BEAVER (*scrutinising the paper*). I can't think, I must have left some lines out. I apologise

SIR JAMES Let me see

BORROW *bands him the paper, he stares at it*
Can't make head or tail of it. (*He bands it back*) Be more careful in future, please, Miss Beaver

MISS BEAVER (*bursting into tears*): It's the first time I've ever made a mistake Oh dear, oh dear—

LADY S-M (*frantically*) Never mind, never mind, go on with the speech—I must continue my speech

BORROW (*continuing*) —Etc., etc—the Union Jack

LADY S-M Go on from there, quickly, quickly!

BORROW (*continuing*) These puling men who write war books, blackening the name of our heroes, putting blasphemous words into the mouths of our soldiers, picturing them as drinking whisky and rum in the trenches, and making obscene jokes, and behaving like brutes These men These slandering scoundrels, should be taken out and shot!

JOHN (*losing control*) Shut up, shut up! Stop!

He hammers the table with his fist The Bishop wakes up with a start

BISHOP An air raid, an air raid, quickly, the coal cellar!

JOHN The nightmare is wearing thin I can't stay much longer

SIR JAMES Have some champagne

JOHN I see you clearly, even though a web of time separates us You are representative You are powerful You always were and you always will be This is delirium, the delirium of dying, but the truth is here, mixed up with my dream, and infinitely horrible The

War was glorious, do you hear me? Supremely glorious, because it set men free. Not the ones who lived, poor devils, but the ones who died. It released them from the sad obligation of life in a Christian world which has not even proved itself worthy of Death.

LADY S.-M.: Charming, quite charming.

JOHN: War is no evil compared with this sort of living. War at least provides more opportunities for actions, decent instinctive clear actions, without time for thought or wariness, beyond the betrayal of fear and common-sense, and all those other traitors to humanity which have been exalted into virtues. It is considered eminently wise to look before you leap. But that is thin and over protective wisdom. Your only chance of seeing at all is after you have leapt. War makes you leap, and leap again into bloody chaos, but there are redeeming moments of vision which might, in smug content, be obscured for ever.

SIR JAMES: England is proud of you, my son.

JOHN: England doesn't know me, or any like me. England now can only recognise false glory. Real England died in defeat without pretending it was Victory.

There is the faint sound of guns far away.

Listen—listen—can't you hear the guns?

SIR JAMES: He sacrificed his life for God and Country.

BORROW: God and Country.

They all chant "God and Country" in a monotone, quite softly, an accompaniment to JOHN's voice as it rises. The guns sound nearer.

JOHN: Listen—listen—you can hear them more clearly now—blasting your Christianity to pieces. You

didn't know, did you? You didn't realise that all the sons you gave, and the husbands you gave, and the lovers you gave in your silly pride were being set free. Free from your hates and loves and small pitiful prayers, for Eternity. You wouldn't have let them go so easily if you'd known that, would you? They've escaped—escaped. You'll never find them again either in your pantomime hell or your tinsel heaven. Long live War. Long live Death, and Destruction and Despair! Through all that there may be a hope, a million to one chance for us somewhere, a promise of something clearer and sweeter than anything your bloody gods have ever offered. Long live War—Long live War—

JOHN is laughing hysterically. SIR JAMES and the others continue to chant "God and Country". The guns grow louder and louder as the lights fade.

In the pitch dark there is suddenly dead silence. Then, PERRY's voice is heard, speaking quietly.)

PERRY'S VOICE I think he opened his eyes

There is a far off splutter of machine-gun fire

SCENE VI

SCENE :—TILLEY, SHAW, BABE ROBINS and JOHN are seated round a dinner table. Dinner is over, and they are drinking coffee and brandy. There is no light anywhere but immediately over the table, beyond its radius is blackness. TILLEY is forty-three, iron grey, and wearing pince-nez. SHAW, at thirty-nine, is extremely corpulent, and pink. BABE ROBINS, aged thirty-two, has the appearance of any average young man in the motor business. All three of them look fairly prosperous. They are wearing dinner jackets, and smoking cigars, and there is somehow less life in them than there was when they were together in War. JOHN is the same as he has been all through the play.

JOHN (*raising his glass*): I give you a Toast. "To Contentment."

TILLEY: Contentment?

JOHN: Yes, and Peace and Plenty.

SHAW: This really is the damnedest dream I've ever had.

BABE: Good old John. Contentment, Peace and Plenty. (*He drinks.*)

TILLEY: Why not? (*He drinks.*)

SHAW: Excellent brandy. (*He drinks.*)

BABE: Pity old Perry isn't here.

TILLEY: I think it's just as well.

JOHN: Why?

TILLEY: He wouldn't fit.

SHAW. He is a bit impossible, I'm afraid. I saw him the other day, changed beyond recognition, and now all this business about his book.

JOHN. You never liked him, did you, Tilley?

TILLEY. Oh, he was all right, then. He had to conform more or less, we all had to.

BABE (*laughing loudly*). You bet we did!

JOHN. You were always a stickler for discipline, Tilley.

TILLEY. Certainly. Sheer common-sense.

JOHN. Are you still?

TILLEY. How do you mean?

JOHN. In civil life, do you still insist on immortal souls forming fours?

SHAW (*laughing, and reaching for some more brandy*). Immortal souls! I say—!

JOHN. Only a phrase—meaning nothing—I apologise.

TILLEY. I must be getting home soon.

JOHN. Where is home?

TILLEY. Hampstead.

JOHN. It's nice, Hampstead.

TILLEY. The air's good, anyhow.

JOHN. Wife and children?

TILLEY. Yes.

JOHN. How many?

TILLEY. Two. Both boys.

JOHN. You're married too, aren't you, Shaw?

SHAW. Yes.

JOHN. Children?

SHAW (*suddenly resentful*). Mind your own business.

JOHN. Sorry.

SHAW. What is all this, anyhow?

JOHN (*raising his glass*): "Family life. Home Notes. Christians Awake!"

TILLEY: Irony seems out of place in you, John, alive or dead.

JOHN: Do you remember Armitage, Babe?

BABE: What?

JOHN: I said, do you remember Armitage?

BABE: Of course I do. Why?

JOHN: How has his memory stayed with you? Is he still clear in your mind? Important?

BABE (*sullenly*): I don't know what you mean.

JOHN: You loved him then.

BABE (*jumping to his feet*): Look here, don't you talk such bloody rot.

JOHN: Don't misunderstand me. There is no slur in that. It was one of the nicest things about you, wholehearted, and tremendously decent. It must be a weak moral code that makes you wish to repudiate it. Love among men in war is gallant and worth remembering. Don't let the safe years stifle that remembrance.

TILLEY: Sentimentalist.

JOHN: You're my last chance, you three. Don't resent me. There is so much I want to know. This is only a dream to you, so you can be honest. It's easier to be honest in a dream. I know barriers are necessary in waking life, barriers, and smoke screens, and camouflage. But here, in unreality, we're together again for a little. Let me see where you are and what you're doing. Is there no contact possible between you and me just because I'm dead? Is it as final as all that? Are you happy with your wives, and children, and prosperity, and peace? Or is it makeshift?

SHAW: I wish I knew what you were getting at.

JOHN I'm trying to find a reason for survival

TILLEY Life is reason enough, isn't it?

JOHN No, I don't believe it is

TILLEY: Nonsense Morbid nonsense

JOHN Have you completely forgotten that strange feeling we had in the war? Have you found anything in your lives since to equal it in strength? A sort of splendid carelessness it was, holding us together Cut off from everything we were used to, but somehow not lonely, except when we were on leave, or when letters came. Depending only upon the immediate moment No past, no future, and no conviction of God. God died early in the war, for most of us Can you remember our small delights? How exciting they were? Sleep, warmth, food, drink, unexpected comforts snatched out of turmoil, so simple in enjoyment, and so incredibly satisfying

TILLEY (*bitterly*) What about the chaps one knew being blown to pieces? Lying out in the mud for hours, dying in slow agony What about being maimed, and gassed, and blinded? Blinded for life?

JOHN There was something there worth even that. Not to the individual perhaps, but to the whole Beyond life and beyond death Just a moment or two

TILLEY To Hell with your blasted moment or two I'm going home.

JOHN To Hampstead?

BABE What's the matter with Hampstead? That's what I want to know What's the matter with Hampstead?

JOHN The air's good, anyhow

SHAW You make me sick, trying to be so damned clever

JOHN: When your boys grow up, Tilley, and there's another war, will you be proud when they enlist?

BABE: There won't be another war.

JOHN: There'll always be another war. Will you let them go? Will you?

TILLEY: I don't flatter myself that it would be in my power to stop them.

JOHN: You could shoot them.

SHAW (*belligerently*): If I had sons, and there were a war, I'd shoot them if they didn't go.

JOHN: Excellent sentiments, but why? From what motives?

SHAW: Because I don't believe in shirking one's responsibilities.

JOHN: To what would your sons be responsible?

SHAW: To the decent standards I'd taught them. To the things I'd brought them up to believe.

JOHN: What would you bring them up to believe?

SHAW: I'll tell you, and you can sneer as much as you like. I'd bring them up to believe in God, and the necessity of standing by their country in time of need, and to play the game according to the rules.

JOHN: And if they made their own rules, and didn't accept God, and didn't consider their country important enough. You'd shoot them?

SHAW: Yes, I would. And that's that.

JOHN: Well, you'd better pray for another war for your sons that are not yet born, because it will all be just as you want. They'll grow up and go off to fight gallantly for their God and country according to the rules, and you'll be proud, quite rightly proud, because they'll be nice, decent boys. I'm quite sure of that. What happens to them out there will be entirely beyond

your comprehension, *then* Even now, after only thirteen years, you've forgotten the essential quality Then, you'll be more forgetful still because you'll be old. You say truculently that you'd shoot them if they didn't go Try with all your might to be brave enough to shoot them when they come back.

BABE (*bitterly*) Stop talking like that! Leave us alone! Let us wake up!

JOHN Hard luck, Babe You might have died instead of me Do you remember?

BABE I didn't ask you to take over the covering party, you offered to, it was your own fault—

JOHN (*gently*) Don't worry about that.

BABE Let me go Let me wake up

JOHN It will be over very soon now

BABE Oh God! Oh God! (*He buries his head in his arms, and sobs*)

From out of the shadows comes BABE, as he was in Scene I, in uniform, aged nineteen. He stands still behind the chair. Guns sound faintly, far away.

JOHN You see? Life hasn't compensated him enough for not dying

SHAW (*to BABE*) Shut up Pull yourself together, for God's sake!

JOHN Interesting that "For God's sake"

SHAW Go away Damn your eyes! Get out—get out!

JOHN Your mind is solemn now, and you're scared You never used to be scared.

SHAW Get out! Go away!

JOHN (*calling sharply*) Shaw—Shaw—come here a minute. Make us laugh You were always clowning Come out, you lazy old bastard

SHAW comes out of the shadows, and stands behind his older self. He winks at JOHN and grins broadly. The sound of guns accompanies him.

JOHN: That's better. More comfortable. Tilley?

TILLEY (*quietly*): I hate you. You won't get me.

JOHN: Why do you hate me?

TILLEY: Stirring up trouble. Bloody Ghost!

JOHN: You were always more intelligent than the others; is that why you're so set against remembering?

TILLEY: You're not as I remember you anyhow. You're a complete stranger. Whatever you've learnt in death hasn't improved you. I intend to forget this dream even before my eyes open.

JOHN: Why—why?

TILLEY: I prefer to remember you as a damn good soldier, a nice uncomplicated boy without overtones. Tuck yourself up on your abstract plane, your fourteenth dimension, wherever you are, and keep your inquisitive hands off my soul. I'm all right. I accept life and peace, as I accepted death and war. They're equal as jobs, and I'm a worker.

JOHN: To what end?

TILLEY: I don't know, any more than you, and I care less. I'm passing the time, do you see? Just passing the time. (*He points contemptuously to SHAW and BABE*) They're malleable, those two, and there are millions like them, easily swayed through their sentimental emotions. You were clever enough to get them on their weaknesses. "Hard luck, Babe, you might have died instead of me." Excellent psychology. You got him on the raw. Hero-worship. "Greater love hath no man, etc., etc." Heart interest. Sex confusion. He'll be like that until he dies. Then Shaw,

with his Public School belligerence, shooting his mythical sons in a fine fury of right-minded patriotism. Look how you got him. "Come here a minute, make us laugh, come out, you lazy old bastard!" Chaps! Good old comrades! "Damn good times we had together" Of course he'd respond to that treatment. Look at him, fashioned for conviviality, round and pink and jolly, and sentimental as a housemaid. You can't catch me out so easily

JOHN All the same, you were sorrier than any of them when they carried me in—dying

TILLEY You were a very good second in command. I always hated losing reliable men.

JOHN Was that all?

TILLEY. Absolutely

JOHN I don't believe it

TILLEY. Funny, personal vanity hanging on so long.

JOHN It wasn't all. It wasn't all. There was more warmth than that, I felt it

TILLEY You were delirious. What you felt doesn't count

JOHN (*weakly*) I'm not dead yet. There are still a few more seconds—

TILLEY Get on with it and don't waste my time.

The lights begin to fade, and the guns sound louder

JOHN. I can't yet. I've got to see mother—I promised—

TILLEY Hurry, hurry, I'm tired—don't keep us all hanging about

The lights go out. In the dark TILLEY's voice is heard speaking authoritatively. He says "Hoist him up a little higher—gently—give me the water." BABE's voice says "Is he—done for?"

SCENE VII

SCENE:—*The lights come up slowly on the Left-hand side of the stage. LADY CAVAN is playing Patience by the window. JOHN is standing by the table.*

JOHN (*urgently*): Mother.

LADY C. (*rising*): So soon?

JOHN: Yes.

LADY C.: It's all right. I won't cry or make a fuss.

JOHN (*holding her in his arms*): Dearest.

LADY C.: It's for ever, isn't it—this time?

JOHN (*whispering*): Yes.

LADY C.: Tell me something. Could you—could you stay if things had been worth it?

JOHN: Perhaps. I don't know. I think so.

LADY C.: You're going—willingly?

JOHN: Yes.

LADY C.: What of me—what of me? (*Brokenly*) Wouldn't I be enough?

JOHN: Only for a little, then you'd die and leave me—terribly alone. I never wanted to be born.

LADY C.: I see.

JOHN: Only a few more years, Mum, be brave.

LADY C.: Do you think there's any chance anywhere in that great void for us to be together again?

JOHN: Maybe. One in a million.

LADY C.: I'm still alive enough to mind. I know it's foolish.

JOHN I'm on the border line and should be near
to knowing, perhaps in eternity the mists will clear,
but I doubt it

LADY C (*very quietly*). I love you, my darling—
with all the love that has ever been It doesn't matter
about eternity, wherever you are, in however deep
oblivion your spirit rests this love will be with you
I know it so very strongly—far beyond the limits of
my understanding I love you, my dear, dear one—
I love you

JOHN Dearest Mum—good-bye

LADY C (*kissing him very tenderly*). Good-bye,
Johannic

The lights fade and go out.

SCENE VIII

The lights come up slowly revealing the dug-out, exactly as it was at the close of Scene I, except that the STRETCHER-BEARERS have advanced as far as the bunk upon which JOHN is lying. They make a movement preparatory to lifting him on to the stretcher. JOHN moves and opens his eyes.

JOHN: You were right, Perry—a poor joke!

He falls back. TILLEY motions the STRETCHER-BEARERS away, and then with infinite tenderness lifts JOHN on to the stretcher as the Curtain falls.

CURTAIN.